

AT THE
KING'S
PLEASURE

EMMA
DOWNING
COOLIDGE



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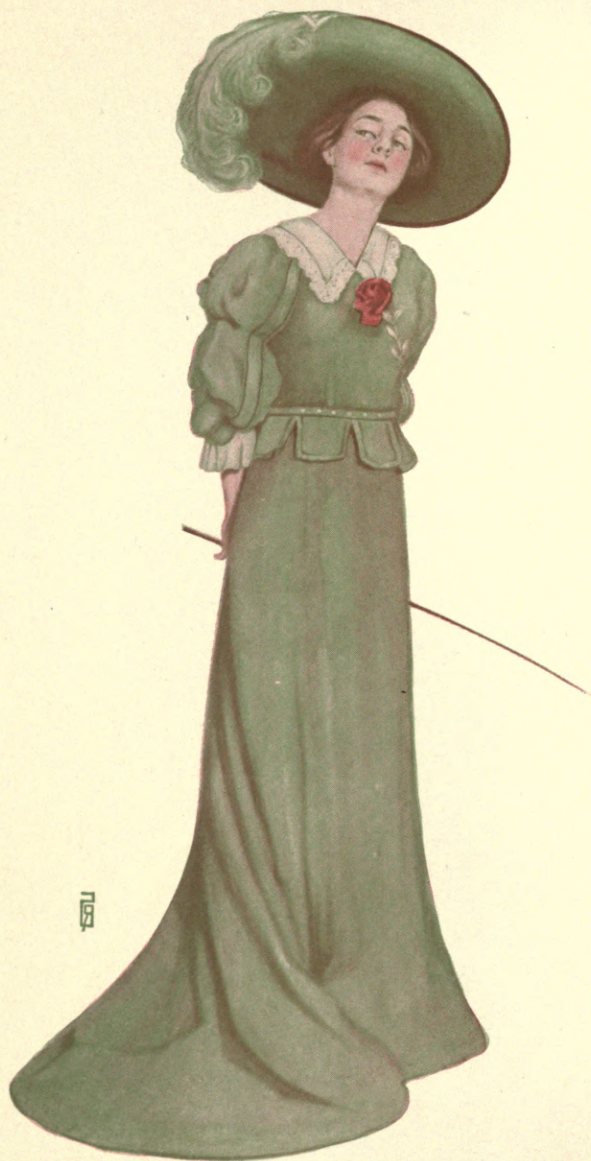
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To
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AT THE KING'S PLEASURE

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"Mademoiselle"

AT THE KING'S PLEASURE

By

EMMA DOWNING COOLIDGE

ILLUSTRATED BY

ROLAND S. STEBBINS

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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To My Mother

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Preface

In the following romance I confess that I have exercised an author's privilege in sacrificing some details of history to the demands of more interesting fiction. Perhaps it would be better to say that I have created certain persons of title that the glamour of their rank might serve to enhance the setting of the story. The majority of the characters are entirely the product of fancy and pleasure. The hero, to whom I have given the title of Francis, Comte of Angoulême, a man of about thirty years of age at the time of Louis XII's accession, was not the heir to the throne. The Francis of Angoulême who became King as Francis I, at the death of Louis in 1515, was only four years old in 1498.

E. D. C.

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CHAPTER I

After Many Years

Darkness was closing in upon Paris and upon the palace of King Louis XII of France. Silence lay upon the city, but it was the brooding silence which signifies passions slumbering and which prophesies a terrible awakening. Murmurings and discontent had been in the speech of men for many days, and Louis knew only too well of the mutterings which came from his people.

Couriers and officers in His Majesty's service had been traveling for weeks on errands of state. Through all the city and even into the provinces the reconnoitering extended.

At the palace nobles discussed the situation in whispers, the while with watchful glances they observed their neighbors. On this day messengers had been hurrying to and fro for hours, yet none amongst the courtiers seemed aware of the true import of the King's activity. That as yet no crisis had been reached was evidenced by the fact that the grand assembly

—a nightly occurrence—was to convene as usual. The only proof of uneasiness was shown by the unprecedented gathering of courtiers in the throne-room fully an hour before the King's entrance would open formally the evening's fête. At least a dozen nobles clothed in court attire had assembled, and although the usual merriment seemed absent from the company, still no strange or sudden silences had marked the conversation.

It was truly a beautiful scene in the throne-room. The richness and grandeur of furnishings of gold and white, the sparkle of mirrors, the gleam of lights whose crystal coverings shone as jewels, all were in accord with the bright-colored garb of men and women in evening dress. Men were resplendent in attire and head-dress. Long silken capes and full breeches, satin slippers buckled with jewels, and hose of gorgeous hues displayed their pride; but more than all, the white powdered curls which graced their stately heads were worthy of attention. Women in long silken robes fastened high at the waist, with sleeves hanging full and loose, displaying the beauty of wrist and shoulder, rivalled the nobles in charm of raiment. Jewels gleamed in hair piled high, and sparkled on throat or fingers as well as upon the fancy slippers. Yet all this was a picture common to the court

and so tonight no second glance was cast by any beholder. Weightier matters absorbed all attention, and the hum of low-pitched voices, with now and then a chiming laugh or a deeper manly note, filled all the room.

Meanwhile, in her apartment, forgetful of all but her own unhappiness, the Princess Helene—cousin to His Most Gracious Majesty King Louis XII of France—looked out of her window and over the deserted gardens to the great wall which surrounded the castle precincts. The darkness settling down upon Paris held yet a few glimmers of sunset light which played upon the battlements of the palace. The Princess smiled sadly, and wondered if darkness were closing around about her also and destroying the last vague hopes which she had cherished. It was time for her to prepare for the evening's assembly, but until long after the last vestige of light had left the grim stone towers she sat at her window and pondered. Only a few hours before a messenger had come to her from the King, requesting audience that night after the assembly, and while she could not know the meaning of the summons her heart was troubled with doubts and perplexity. She realized that her happiness was in the balance, and, realizing it, her woman's desire battled with her princess's pride.

She was still far from solving her problem when the door was opened almost noiselessly, and the rustling of a woman's draperies caused her to turn.

"Marguerite!" cried the Princess, softly and gladly. In her tone was the love of one who knew and trusted.

"Your Highness does not send me away?" queried the other, gently. "I dared to intrude despite the orders given your ladies-in-waiting."

"And I am glad, Marguerite, that thou hast come to me."

The girl came to her side and looked down into the great saddened eyes. Instantly her jesting manner changed to one of concern.

"Your Highness is troubled," she said anxiously, and her voice thrilled with tender sympathy. "Helene, tell me, what has happened to oppress thee?"

The Princess put her hand upon the girl's shoulder and drew her down. Gently the maid-of-honor sank to her knees beside her. It was plain that here no thought of rank had forbidden friendship, for between these two existed the love and faith which made confidences possible.

"Look, my friend," cried Helene in sorrow, as she thrust a parchment into Marguerite's hands, "a summons from His Majesty!"

As Marguerite read her kindly eyes became grave. "Dost think, then, that it is ill?" she questioned. "Mayhap 'tis of myself—" she faltered, but her tone belied the hope she offered.

"Nay, Marguerite, 'tis not of thee that he would question me. I fear—Lord D'Antaurier—" she also faltered, then cried passionately, "ah, has it not been plain, my friend? Could any doubt his love for me? Could any question that I have been exceeding kind to him? The King saw—and sent him on a mission. Not yet has he returned, and I fear—" she choked with her half-spoken terror—"Ah, Marguerite, for days this fear has haunted me, and when the summons came I could no longer drive the horror from me. He will not return. Death awaits him on the highway. Assassins of the King will take him from me. Ah, it is simple when rank forbids!"

"Nay, nay, Princess!" cried Marguerite, aghast. "Surely not that, Helene. He will return in all safety to thee—."

"But this," interrupted Helene, tapping the parchment. "Ah, no! The King knows our secret. He will drag it from me tonight, and then, given excuse—for him—a death sentence or imprisonment—if he returns at all—."

"Thou lovest him!" exclaimed Marguerite, with conviction.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders half mockingly. "What wouldst thou?" she demanded, but her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Does he know?" asked the other gently.

"Lord D'Antaurier? Nay. Nay."

"Thou art wrong, Helene, if thou lovest him, not to admit thy love," rebuked her friend.

"I am a princess," Helene returned with hauteur, "he a noble."

"And a man," added the lady-in-waiting softly, then she laughed derisively, "which is indeed a rarity at court."

"What meanest thou?"

"That now is thy moment of power, Princess. Demand the right to love as love thou dost. Demand of thy King his consent to thy marriage to Lord D'Antaurier. Do not risk delay. Answer my lord as fearlessly and bravely as though thou wert a peasant woman instead of a princess. Thou hast yet a few hours. Use them for thy great happiness. I do not doubt me that at ten tonight the King will command thee to wed the Prince, and then 'twill be too late. See, it is six by the clock now. Three glorious hours are thine, when thou enterest the assembly. Ah,

Helene, listen to me. Yield thy pride to thy love. Thou wouldst indeed be sorry to wed Francis, Comte of Angoulême. Yet that is what thou must do unless thou shalt yield tonight to thy woman's heart. Hear me, dear, before it is too late. I have suffered from false pride, not only in my girlhood days, but much more since exile sent me into Spain, and I can well advise thee for thy happiness."

"What knowest thou of love—and of a woman's pride?" asked the Princess almost coldly as she arose and left her window-seat. Her eyes, however, watched in fascination her companion.

Marguerite also arose and went to the window from which she seemed to be looking. Her face was sad with a strange pathos, and her voice when she spoke vibrated with intense feeling. Seeing this, the Princess learned for the first time those hidden secrets which held a sorrow deeper than she had ever known could exist, and she knew that here was a sadness whose depth she could never fathom.

"What knowest thou of love?" Marguerite repeated softly, and she faced her friend. "Only such as all women learn who love—and forfeit happiness, Your Highness. Once, not many years ago, I learned the meaning of that wondrous word—and then—because the

man who loved me changed his views on certain subjects, I allowed my pride of noble birth to send him from me. I silenced his protests, disdained his reverence, sacrificed my own love. Not long afterward my father and I were exiled to Spain, and Victor de Belleamie did not even know that I had left the Province of Montarson. He was in Paris, I in Spain. Since the day I scorned him I have never seen him." She came slowly toward the Princess. "I ask Your Highness if this sacrifice has paid. Do I love him less? Nay—more. Do I despise him because he no longer serves the King? Nay, he is Victor, and I love him."

"He serves *Le Capitaine*?" the Princess questioned fearfully.

"I know not. He serves the King's denouncers. I know no more."

"Thou hast not forgotten him? Do none here at court make thee forget his face?"

"Princess, thou sayest thou knowest love. None can take his place. And soon thou wilt learn that none can take the place of him thou lovest. I pray thy knowledge may not come too late, as did mine."

"What wouldst thou have me do? Remember I am a princess."

"And a woman!—with a woman's contrariness and her helplessness. Yet thou hast

managed to keep trace of Lord D'Antaurier, and await his return with eager anxiety. Messengers are on the lookout daily for his arrival, and they are of the Princess's choosing, not of the King's."

"How knowest thou this?" exclaimed the Princess with chagrin.

Marguerite only smiled wistfully. "I believe, Helene, that he will come tonight, and thou must be ready to receive him. Come, put thyself in my hands, and let me wield thy future in this hour. Wear thy gown of white, and around thy throat thy collarette of pearls. In thy hair a rose—but one—a full blown, red, red rose, the token of thy love. Then wilt thou be beautiful in thy simplicity. Smile upon him when he comes, not merrily nor mockingly, but wistfully as now. Let thine heart speak, Helene, and bring joy to thee as well as to him."

Eagerly the Princess had listened to her words. Pride had fled from her face, leaving it tenderly sweet and wistful.

"I yield me, Marguerite," she said tearfully. "Do with me as thou wilt. I love him."

In the throne-room affairs of state were still being discussed. Suddenly above the murmuring of many voices there came the

announcement of a page as he held aside the drapery for a noble to enter, and at the mention of his name many turned to observe the newcomer.

One of the nobles who had been a silent listener in a group of officers, a man between fifty and sixty years of age, made his way quickly to meet this courtier and fellow-soldier just entering, and extended his hand in cordial welcome.

"Ah, my Lord DeChatton, I give you greeting! It is some time since I have had that honor here at court."

"True, Monsieur Beaumon," responded the other in a full, deep voice which was pleasing to the ear. "Tonight for the first time in many months I have come to the assembly. To be sure, I have not all that time been absent from Paris, but only yesterday I returned from Montarson."

"Montarson." M. Beaumon repeated the name dreamily and sadly. "That name, Monsieur, holds many memories for us both. Is there, then, news from the Province?"

"Very little, Monsieur," was DeChatton's sorrowful reply. "Gloom and despair seem to have settled down upon our once happy valley. Those whom we knew and loved best no longer dwell there, but are wandering none knows where. Those remaining have

sunken into the calm which proclaims unhappiness and the death of hope. Since the turmoil which ended in exile to Spain for so many of our people, little of moment has befallen the Province. You have no doubt heard much of that history and of the desolation which filled all our valley at that time."

"Ah, yes, my lord, of that and of many other events, which, because they preceded this, have become insignificant in comparison to all but a few people. Though it is now many years since I have been to Montarson, as you know, still I live much in its past. I know that Victor is no longer in the province—" he broke off abruptly, and then continued as if remembering the presence of others—"surely there has come some word from the Marquis de Belleamie since he left Montarson?"

"Nay, Monsieur, there has come no message," returned DeChatton, sadly. "It seems unreal to me—the events of the past few years. It seems but yesterday that we daily were guests at the château of his father, and that we were instructing Victor in the arts of riding and of sword-play."

Monsieur Beaumon nodded but did not speak.

"Yet I was never as were you to the lad," continued DeChatton, "and thus I have often

marveled at his sudden departure from the Province, and even more at his change of views. Never had the King more loyal subject than the elder Marquis, and so it is the stranger that his son, instilled through youth with admiration for royalty, should have forsaken his father's party to join with the rabble of Paris headed by Le Capitaine."

"Yet, my lord," interposed M. Beaumon, "this same party which you term 'rabble' is composed of many of those whose houses trace back to royal blood, and who in bygone centuries served at their sovereign's throne."

At this remark significant glances and nods of acquiescence were exchanged by several courtiers. During the pause which ensued, an officer of the guard, accompanying a woman gowned in evening dress of black velvet, entered the assembly, and they made their way to one of the groups near the speakers. Neither of the latter gentlemen appeared to notice their arrival, yet they were greeted by gravely polite bows from all nobles, as befitted one who held the honored position of maid-of-honor to the Princess Helene.

Presently DeChatton aroused from the deep reverie in which he had been sunk, and addressed his friend in a meditative manner.

"This calls to my mind vague rumors which have come to us from Spain. They concern the Marquis de Bonnavite."

M. Beaumon nodded as he made answer. "He it was who served so well in wars of France when King Louis was only Duc of Orleans, and who returned to Montarson to wed the maid-of-honor to the queen."

DeChatton cast a keen glance upon the other. "A maiden renowned for wit and beauty through all the realm even as was her daughter after her before exile became her lot," added he, softly.

M. Beaumon paled and his hand clenched nervously upon his scabbard. "You have news of them, the Marquis and his daughter?" His voice sounded harsh and dry as from great emotion.

"Rumors only, but rumors which may prove too true. It is said that the Marquis succumbed to his long journey and died shortly after reaching Spain. The girl, thus left alone, took refuge with friends among exiles; but her lot must be a sad and dreary one. Courted, fêted, wooed, and worshipped as she was in their château at Montarson, her present plight is doubly hard to think upon. It would seem, M. Beaumon, that cruel fortune has turned a cheerless back upon the two whom we most greatly loved. The maid, a wanderer in a strange land, the youth no less so, and lost to us so far as word can bring us hope. Methinks, too, that the friendship

which once did exist between them has been rudely shattered. Formerly I did dream that love for the other would spring up in each heart; but even though it may have, he left in coldness for the duties of Paris, and I doubt if he even knows that she is an exile in Spain. Sometimes, my friend, I feel that we shall never again look upon either of these children. But there is something of which I would speak to you. I would not press your confidence, M. Beaumon, but, as you know, I love the young Marquis, and I would like to learn the cause of his sudden departure to Paris and of his change in opinions. I realize that you who are acquainted with his every mood must have guessed this riddle. I would that you could trust me enough to explain his demeanor. He was ever grave and thoughtful, wise beyond his years, not given to wine and merrymaking, neither was he easily influenced. No passing fancy, therefore, led him to desert the royal cause, but some more worthy motive which was not the quick growth of idle words spoken by some enthusiast."

M. Beaumon, who had been eyeing his companion steadily, made grave reply. "You are right, Lord DeChatton, Victor de Belleamie grew from a studious, thoughtful youth to a more serious, thoughtful manhood. His mind dwelt upon things which are not often

in the minds of lads just entering the merry heyday of gallants. But in all his life there was a deeper note, a desire for good, a yearning for truth, and a seeking for wisdom. Around him were companions whose desires turned upon wine and carousal, and these accompanied by vice in all its evil forms. He saw the shallowness of such a life as portrayed by those young nobles of the court who had respect for no one, either man or woman—far less for the latter, God knows!—nor even for the King himself. Chivalry was to him a virtue inherent, not acquired. Woman meant for him the shrine where all true men should worship. Courage sustained conviction. Truth defended honor, and honor was the one firm principle of his great manhood.”

The noble delivered his words, a torrent of eloquence, to all his hearers. Then he turned to his audience, and with hand extended in partial appeal and in partial censure, addressed them:

“You know whereof I speak—you who have dwelt in courts of kings for many days. Does peace lie within its realm? Truth, say you? Bah! Courage?”—he shrugged his shoulders—“the courage which is worse than cowardice. Sincerity? You trust few of your fellow-courtiers and rightly so. Fidelity?

Ah, you smile! And lastly honor, then? You blush with shame, and your eyes speak knowledge of the court. Few among us know the meaning of the word."

Many of the women, whose faces had crimsoned beneath his scornful charge, turned haughtily away; and men could not meet one another's gaze.

"And that, Friend DeChatton, is the answer to your question. Not here in service of his King could Victor find the sum of his ideals. There was the other course, and the only one. He took it, and therein do I honor him."

There was a silence of shamed acknowledgement of the speaker's home truths, then she who wore the black velvet robe stepped out of the group surrounding and impulsively approached the noblemen.

"My Lord Beaumon, you speak harshly of your court and of your noblemen and women, yet we must admit the truth of your stern words, though to our great shame and unhappiness, be it said. This man of whom you speak—Victor de Belleamie—is not unknown to us at court even though he scorned to join the throng of nobles as was his right by birth. Yet there are some who do not judge him ill on that account. Nay, mayhap, we also honor him, for even here, my lord, corrupt and poor as

you may esteem us, there are some who love those virtues which you believe are foreign to our court."

DeChatton had turned aside when the noblewoman had approached M. Beaumon, but at the first sound of her melodious voice he faced about in eager questioning. At sight of her his lips parted, and he made a step toward her as if to address her. Then, realizing the situation, he again turned away and went to the balcony window behind all courtiers, whence, unobserved, he could watch this woman whom he had recognized.

M. Beaumon stared in confusion at the beautiful woman before him whose plea had touched a tender chord. He took a quick step toward her, fascinated by the expression in her countenance.

"My lady, I crave your pardon for my harsh words, and for the lack of faith I have displayed. One needs only to look upon such women of our realm to know that all nobility has not succumbed to the corruption of a pleasure-seeking court."

Her face softened and she held out her hand to him. He made as though to kiss it, but she restrained him. "Nay, my Lord Beaumon, I wish to shake your hand in friendship, and I would question you concerning the Province of Montarson if you will permit."

"Gladly!" The nobleman proffered his arm which the woman graciously accepted, and they went slowly toward the balcony window where they could converse unheard.

"It is evident, Monsieur Beaumon," the clear contralto voice continued before he could speak, "that you have forgotten me. And yet, not many years ago, you did declare that you would know me anywhere and under any circumstance. Look upon me well. Come, have I so changed that Victor's playmate is unknown to you?"

"Marguerite!" cried the courtier bewilderedly, and tears of joyful recognition sprang to his kindly eyes.

The maid-of-honor laughed delightedly, and clasped her hands tightly over his. Then once more she heard her name and she turned in surprise. A moment she looked fixedly at the man beside her, then her face lighted, and with a cry of gladness she held out her hands to him.

"My Lord DeChatton!"

"Marguerite!" was all he could reply.

"Marguerite, yes," she said in a low tone, "but not Bonnavite. Only the Princess Helene knows my true name. I rest in her protection. After the death of my father, the rumor of which has reached you as I heard you say but now, I returned from Spain

and gained admission to the palace and to Princess Helene in the garb of a nun. As I had hoped when I had told her my history, she took me under her protection, made me her maid-of-honor, and introduced me as Marguerite Montarson. The King last of all must learn the truth. I trust in your discretion. But tonight when I saw you, Monsieur Beaumon, and heard you mention Victor's name, I could not conquer my desire to make myself known to you. Tell me, then, of Victor and of my home. I am hungry for the news."

It was some time later that M. Beaumon turned to DeChatton and said huskily:

"And you said, friend, that we should never see this maid again."

CHAPTER II

The Magic of a Song

It was in the year 1498 that King Charles VIII of France, only son of Louis XI, died without male heirs, and with his death the rule of his sister, Anne of Beaujeu, who had been the actual power behind the weak king, came to an abrupt end. Louis, Duc of Orleans, his cousin and brother-in-law, was crowned under the title of Louis XII. Thus in his thirty-sixth year Louis of Orleans reached the zenith of his ambitions, and gained at length the power which he had coveted and striven to possess by more than one intrigue against the powerful Anne of Beaujeu.

But Louis XII did not find the rule of France an easy task. With his success came troubles also in triple force. As Duc of Orleans he had been well-beloved by many followers, worshipped by his soldiers, and admired by the staunch old nobles of the provinces. All had been bound to him by ties of loving homage. His trials in war and

in adversity had given him the sympathy and kindly feeling toward his people that had won for him all hearts.

But to inherit the crown was to inherit likewise the enemies of its former possessors, and both Louis XI and Charles VIII left many such bequests to their royal cousin. The conquest of Italy had long been the cause of much bitter feeling on the part of the common class of France upon whom fell the burden of taxation and military service which exposed their families to want and suffering. Although Louis XII reduced taxation as soon as he became king, still the people remained suspicious when they saw him turning eager eyes upon the Venetian possessions. They believed that they were being pacified only until such time as the King should choose to renew the struggle abroad.

For yet another act of Louis XI's did his successors suffer—the wholesale vengeance which that King had taken upon nobles and others whom he had discovered in plots against the crown. Innocent sons of the highest families had been imprisoned or beheaded to satisfy the King in his bitter desire for punishment. Naturally the nobles who remained of those houses upon whom such cruel wrong had been visited, could neither forget nor forgive the family royal.

There was yet another reason why the new King of France found his first year of rule a most unhappy one. At fourteen he had been forced into a loveless marriage, for reasons of state, with King Louis XI's crippled daughter, Joan, and he had uncomplainingly borne for twenty-two years the burden of an alliance hateful to his pleasure and beauty-loving nature, though the marriage was one in name only. Now, freed by the deaths of both kings, he endeavored to set aside his unloved wife and to enter upon an existence in which his own wish should have full sway, and he could enjoy every man's birthright of freedom of will.

These circumstances together with the jealousy of the deposed Anne of Beaujeu worked to his disadvantage; and it was at this time that his secret enemies gathered together their forces to make demands which the new king—harassed abroad by his foes among the Venetians, Swiss, Spaniards and English, and at home by Joan's and Anne's partisans—could not meet.

It was not until a later period that he entered into marriage with Anne of Brittany, from which day his troubles dispersed and he led a more contented life than many of France's sovereigns, becoming a generous and kindly ruler and the far-famed "father of his people."

The Huguenots and Catholics, even now ready to burst into riot, were not the least annoying of his foes. Then another party, composed of both sects, whom some few grievances in common had joined, in a night became powerful and insistent. The leader of this party, *Le Capitaine*, so called, was a man whose identity remained concealed, yet if his name and station were unknown, not so his deeds, for today all Paris rang with the news that he was feared by none other than King Louis XII himself. Why? The question found voice upon all sides, and meanwhile the castle trembled beneath the questioning.

It was this which held all attention in the throne room, yet none had dared to speak the momentous solution. The conversation which had been even enough during the quiet aside of Monsieur Beaumon and his companions, now became heated and loud. Indeed, the anger in one nobleman's tone caused all to turn questioningly toward the speaker.

"You doubt, then, my veracity," the voice demanded. "Let me say to you, Lord Marienne, that I know that His Majesty signed the pardons."

"Then, my lord, they have miscarried," returned Lord Marienne quietly, "for it is now two months since word has come from Spain, and if, as you say, my lord, the pardons

were then signed they surely should have reached the hands of those for whom they were intended."

Marguerite glanced fearfully at her companions.

"True, Lord Marienne, and that is my point. I believe that those papers never reached Spain. Had they been safely delivered the exiles would have been in Paris by this time. It is my opinion that they have fallen into the possession of none other than Le Capitaine, and that this fact accounts for the mysterious doings of to-day. Should he make demands upon the King under such circumstances, they must be complied with. We all have learned what is the chief desire of the people. I prophecy that if Le Capitaine holds these papers, we shall shortly hear His Majesty announce the betrothal of the Princess Helene to the Comte of Angoulême."

"An order not much to the taste of my Lord D'Antaurier, I warrant!" exclaimed Lord Marienne.

"Nor, mayhap, to hers," added a second courtier, seriously.

"Nor even to the Prince himself," drily put in a third.

"But his love is not given elsewhere," demurred Lord Marienne.

"Not to our knowledge, 'tis true, but

Francis of Angoulême is not one to be a puppet even in the King's hands, either in marriage or in any other matter."

"Permit me to remark, my friend," said Lord Marienne, "that my Lord D'Antaurier is not in Paris, and that the crisis is at hand when he is defenseless. It would appear that this has not happened by pure accident. Those qualities which made the Duc of Orleans successful still exist in the King of France. It is his forethought which has robbed the Princess and my Lord D'Antaurier of all their weapons."

"This evening will decide their fate, else I much mistake," returned his comrade gravely.

"Her Highness, the Princess Helene!"

A murmuring, followed by silence, marked the announcement of the page. The Princess entered with firm and stately tread, but she kept her eyes downcast.

It was as if her heart was too heavy with foreboding even for the outward show of pride and rank which was usually so natural to her. Her dignity, however, was unimpaired, and only the few who were her friends noted that her head was held less high than was her wont, and that sadness was in her countenance instead of the impassive majesty which had set her apart amongst the women of the court as though she had been a queen

upon her throne. Not that the Princess was either cold or haughty in a disagreeable sense. She merely held herself aloof because it was her natural characteristic so to do and because unconsciously she was a superior woman. Had she but known it, her new humility only added to her charm and beauty. Tall, slender and willowy as she was, tonight she seemed to sway and bend with the grace of a gentle flower, buffeted by a heavy wind. Her face, pale from her emotion of the tedious day, was smooth and pure as polished marble untinged with any shade of coloring. Her eyes, dreamy with new thoughtfulness, were deep in hue as fresh-blown violets; and crowned by all, her beauty was enhanced by the heavy coil of golden hair, her inheritance from her English mother, which she wore so high that her glorious height was only made more admirable.

The Lady Marguerite's charms were not to be denied but because she lacked the dignity of bearing which Princess Helene's height imparted to her she was not termed as "handsome" a lady in the court of France. She was, however, a fitting complement of the lady she served as maid-of-honor. Darker in coloring; her hair a mixture of brown and gold, her eyes a clear, soft grey, and her skin a darker shade than the Princess's cold white, the added pink of her cheeks made her alluring to look upon,

while her gay, vivacious manner spelled her a very witch for charm and daintiness.

Tonight, as Marguerite had dictated, the Princess was clothed entirely in white, her only jewels a collar of pearls. A dainty shawl half-concealed the gleaming shoulders and throat. The sleeves of her dress hung long and flowing. In her hair was a single full-blown red rose. As she advanced and greeted her courtiers she glanced shyly around as if in search of someone, while to the astute observer her attitude betrayed a certain hesitancy or expectancy. She was followed by pages and two maids-of-honor. Suddenly her glance fell upon Marguerite, and her quick smile summoned the girl to her side. Together they approached DeChatton and M. Beaumon.

"Monsieur Beaumon!" the Princess called in gay command, "I would have you here beside me that I may present my friend, Mademoiselle Montarson. Methinks the very name will commend her to you, my lord."

M. Beaumon without a moment's hesitancy bent over Marguerite's hand as he would over that of any new acquaintance at court.

"Mademoiselle Montarson has already found a place within my heart by some words exchanged before your entrance, Princess, and we have been comparing items of news."

"Ah, and have you then news for any other, my lord?" she returned significantly.

"I have no word, Your Highness," M. Beaumon replied in a low voice. "My lord has not yet returned to Paris. Today I sent messengers into the surrounding provinces, and should fortune favor us he will ride in all haste to Paris if he receives my summons. Rest in peace, Princess, good fortune will yet be with us."

"Not yet returned?" repeated the Princess slowly and disappointedly. "I do not understand. I cannot see. Messages have been in pursuit of him for days. Why does he not receive them? Some danger has befallen him, or else my summons means nothing to him as I had supposed. Oh, Monsieur, why does he not come to me when I need him so?"

Many courtiers turned, attracted by her tone though they had not heard her words. Marguerite quickly shielded her from their gaze, and she placed her hand soothingly upon Helene's arm. The Princess had covered her eyes with her hand, but now at the girl's gentle touch she raised her head defiantly and laughed into her friends' faces.

"Why, my lords, what gravity is this I see when tonight all should be merriment and good cheer?" With these mocking words she moved slowly toward the window and there,

unobserved, brushed away her tears. Her ruse deceived all beholders. Only her three friends knew the anguish in her heart.

“His Majesty, the King!”

A blush, vivid and painful, swept over Helene’s countenance, but she did not move from her position at the window while the King entered and took his place upon the dais. Hardly had the bustle following his arrival subsided when an officer of the guard hurried into the room, advanced to the throne, and knelt before King Louis. His evident eagerness and haste aroused great interest. This did not escape the King’s keen observation, and he leaned forward anxiously, as he cried:

“Rise, my lord—your message?”

“Your Majesty,” exclaimed the officer loudly, “I come to announce that my Lord D’Antaurier has entered Paris and will present himself at the palace this evening.”

Nothing could have been more astounding to all hearers, in view of the day’s conversations. The King arose in his surprise, and forgot that by his manner all could read his secret.

“My Lord D’Antaurier! Here! My lord returned tonight—and here at the palace!”

His glance sought out the Princess where she leaned forward, her face tense with feeling. A moment they gazed at each other half

fearfully, while all courtiers watched the little scene. The King's words had betrayed a special significance. His glance seemingly accused her. DeChatton grasped M. Beaumon's arm.

"He comes inopportunately," he whispered.

"Hush," returned the other, exultingly, "*he is here!*"

DeChatton followed his gaze toward a page who was advancing to the throne.

"My Lord D'Antaurier!"

The Princess wheeled abruptly to face the entrance and her hand which had been raised to her bosom dropped to her side.

Clad in riding attire and carrying his long-plumed hat in his hand, Lord D'Antaurier stood in the doorway.

At the announcement a murmuring had swept over the assembly, numbering now one hundred persons. The King, taken unaware, started to resume his seat, then did not. Now he stood staring almost fearfully at the nobleman whose coming he did not desire.

But the nobleman's gaze did not rest on his sovereign to whom he had in all appearance come to pay his respects, and to report upon the mission from which he had just returned. Instead he looked into a pair of tender blue eyes fixed pleadingly upon him, and as his hand touched the missive in his waistcoat

which had brought him hot-haste from a province six leagues away, there crept into his mind a beautiful hope. He little dreamed that his eyes mirrored the love in his heart, and that, with a woman's intuition, the Princess had read and rejoiced. It was only a moment that they spoke thus silently, for D'Antaurier was obliged to approach the throne to pay his allegiance. Reluctantly, therefore, he hurried on and saluted the King.

"You return in good time, my Lord D'Antaurier," said the King quietly.

"Yea, Sire, and in good fortune also," returned the noble evenly.

"You succeeded then?" cried the King joyfully.

"Beyond my wildest hopes, Sire."

"I congratulate you."

"Nay, Sire, rather congratulate my luck," corrected the noble laughingly, and the King smiled.

"I shall desire to hear more of this later." The King bowed, and D'Antaurier, considering himself dismissed, turned to join the other courtiers.

As he greeted his fellow-nobles by cordial handshakes, passing quickly from one to another with a merry word, many glanced after him in admiration and friendship, and more than one admitted that he was worthy

of the attention of even a princess of the blood royal. His fine physique, and clean cut face, his dashing, smiling manner, tinged with the elusive reserve which marked unusual strength of character, all proclaimed him a man of men; even as the Princess Helene was a woman above others in attributes as well as rank.

It was not strange that he should have loved the Princess and that she should have surrendered her heart to him, if it is indeed true as is widely said that one is attracted to one's opposite. Lord D'Antaurier was as dark as the Princess was blonde. His olive skin glowed with the health and vigor of his soldier's life, and his eyes, large and full-set, gleamed with spirit and laughter in their dark brown depths. Moreover, tall though she was, he towered full many inches above her golden head in a strength and protective power most satisfying to them both.

Critically the Princess watched his approach, and as she noted these same qualities which pleased all beholders, she felt a new thrill of pride and pleasure in his manly beauty and strength. Every smallest detail of his carriage—the proud, imperious tilt of his shapely head, the steady, graceful stride, the military squareness of his shoulders—was imprinted in her mind. The charm and fitness of his

garb, also, did not escape her, and she had time only to wonder how he had managed to array himself in such immaculate riding attire after his long journey before he was bowing to Marguerite, even as he bent over and kissed her own hand.

"My lord," she faltered, "you return more speedily than we had thought."

He glanced at her questioningly. "But not too speedily I trust,—for His Majesty's pleasure?"

"Nay," she answered, gently, "nor for that of others of his court, mayhap."

"Princess!" he cried so joyously and beseechingly that her eyes drooped before his.

He was awakening to new daring—her dear message beneath his waistcoat gave him courage—and Marguerite, seeing their mutual absorption, turned away with a new wistfulness in her heart.

The King, grown weary of the lack of mirth, and noting the interest with which the Princess and D'Antaurier conversed, moved impatiently in his chair, and then remarked drily:

"Methinks, my lords and ladies, that gaiety hangs heavy on our spirits tonight. Mayhap a song would bring us cheer and merriment. My Lady Montarson, wilt thou not favor us?"

Slowly Marguerite approached the throne, a vague sadness in her face.

"My lady's harp, Monsieur," commanded the King of an officer near the dais.

The latter handed her the instrument, and Marguerite seated herself at the foot of the throne.

"Methinks, Mademoiselle," the King addressed her kindly, "that you are not in mood for joyous song. Nay? Then sing to us of what you will."

Marguerite smiled at the King and touched the harp-strings caressingly. Then after a moment she began to sing in low tones which grew gradually stronger yet never harsh, and all the company hushed to listen, so wondrous sweet was it.

"A soldier rode through the darkening night,
And made his way through perils grim,
But all the while his heart was light,
And a song on his lips voiced the song
within.

'I dream of the blue of a lady's eyes,
Of the gold in her hair and a marble skin,
I dream of lips whose red I prize,
And I long to read the heart she hides.
Ah, I dream of eyes as blue and fair
As the gold is pure in her golden hair,
And I dream of the love that could shine in
them
For the man of men—somewhere!

Ah, would that her eyes were blue for me,
And the rose in her hair were a token rare!
Ah, would that the smile which glints so fair
Were token of love—for me!
That the red, red rose in her hair of gold,
That the rose on her cheek which its rival is,
That the smile in her eyes so true would hold
The promise of love for me!
But what care I if her eyes be blue,
If her hair be gold, and her lips are rose,
And what care I if she fair may be,
If only her heart is true!
But she dwells in realms I cannot reach,
A lady high in court of kings,
And I—? A soldier I,
Yet love may live in the meanest things,
And I can't tear out my heart—not I!
Ah, would that I were a noble grand,
Or she a peasant maid,
For then I'd dare to seek her hand,
And with love find love repaid.' "

Not yet had the spell of the Princess's greeting fallen away from Lord D'Antaurier, and now at Marguerite's words he looked down into Helene's face, fascinated, eager, beseeching, and she in her turn could no longer quiet the love in her heart, but met his gaze with a strange timidity. Her cape had fallen from her shoulders. Gently he drew it

back into place, trembling at the touch of his hand on her neck. She did not shrink from his nearness, and emboldened, his hand slipped caressingly to her wrist, then grasped her fingers eagerly. The next moment he had raised them to his lips, in a reverent impulse. She drew her hand away slowly, and stood with averted head, but she did not rebuke him by word or glance.

The song had ended, while the King's moody, cynical eyes drank in the little tableau. He smiled grimly, and the courtiers seeing his sneer, followed his look, then exchanged significant glances. M. Beaumon touched DeChatton's arm. The latter nodded but did not raise his eyes. M. Beaumon shrugged his shoulders, and lifted his hands in gesture of resignation. A page, clothed in white, appeared in the doorway. Instantly the King arose.

"My lords and ladies of the court, shall we not repair to the dining hall? The Lady Montarson has favored us, but her words stir up our hearts rather than enliven." He smiled sadly upon Marguerite. "Mayhap a foaming glass of wine, good cheer, and dainty food may warm our mood to merriment and mirth."

With his attendants he led the way toward the banquet-room as he spoke, and the nobles

quickly sought partners, and offered their escort. The maids-of-honor to the Princess approached her but she silently signified her wish that they precede her. Gladly they complied, pleased at the opportunity to converse freely with their escorts. Only the Princess and my Lord D'Antaurier remained in the room as M. Beaumon proffered his arm to Marguerite. In the doorway the girl paused and cast a saddened glance at the two silent, tense figures beside the window.

"Princess!" The word was fraught with suppressed feeling. It caressed; and the Princess, startled, looked up at her companion. Then she noted the deserted room.

"We must join the others in the dining-hall," she cried hastily.

"Surely you do not fear to be alone with me?" he questioned. "I know my eyes speak my madness, that my face, my gestures, my voice betray me, even though I dare not speak my love. The song that Lady Marguerite sang! Princess, such am I tonight, such have I been for many a day!"

"My lord, you are mad!" But even while pride spoke, the Princess's eyes were soft with emotion.

"Mad? Aye, Princess, mad with a madness which can never be cured. I love you—" gently he took her hand in his—"although my

rank is far below your own; and 'I can't tear out my heart—not I,' for through all my days, through all my journeys, and duties and travels,

“ ‘I dream of the blue of a lady's eyes,
Of the gold in her hair and a marble skin,
I dream of lips whose red I prize,
And I long to read the heart she hides.’ ”

“Tonight, last night, yea, for every night that I have been away on mission for the King, I have faced all dangers and perils with the picture ever before me of a woman far above me in rank, but with a heart too kind to scorn the humble follower for her smile, and I, though only a lord in all this realm of nobles born,

“ ‘I dream of eyes as blue and fair
As the gold is pure in her golden hair,
And I dream of the love that could shine in
them,
For the man of men—somewhere.’ ”

His voice faltered, and she watched him fascinated; then unsteadily, gropingly, she made her way to the divan. In an instant he was beside her, bending to try to read her averted face. Then, his hand resting on the

divan just over her shoulders, he stooped and reverently kissed the flower in her hair, and the Princess covered her eyes lest he read too much of her heart.

“Ah, would that her eyes were blue for me,
And the rose in her hair were a token rare!
That the smile in her eyes so true would hold,
The promise of love—for me!”

He paused and waited, but she gave no sign, and he set his lips grimly for he thought he read her coldness.

“But what care I if she fair may be,
If only her heart be true!”

In spite of the forced lightness in his manner the woman read the deep hurt of her apparent shrinking, and it caused her own suffering to surpass his own.

“Helene!” He could control himself no longer. His hand, resting behind her shoulders, caressed her tenderly.

As though his touch had awakened her from a dream, she sprang to her feet, lifted her head proudly, and held out a detaining hand.

“Monsieur, Monsieur, no more, I beg of you! Remember, I am the Princess, and you—and you—!” she faltered.

He straightened, and with a gesture of obedience which hurt her more than she would have admitted, he quoted with a jauntiness which did not deceive her:

“ ‘But she dwells in realms I cannot reach,
A lady high in court of kings, and I—’ ”

He shrugged his shoulders mockingly—“A poor devil of a noble who lost his head! Your pardon, Princess. Once I dreamed that you were not cold and proud and haughty, save as all true women should be for self-esteem. I dreamed that yours was one of those rare, fine natures that would yield to better impulses when true love should speak. However, my dream is past—and—again your pardon, Princess,” he bowed coldly—“I bid you a courteous farewell.”

He turned as though to leave the room. The Princess hesitated only an instant. Her words to Marguerite rang in her ears, and at last she knew that what her friend had said was true—that none could take the place of this nobleman beside her, however long might be her waiting.

“Monsieur—my lord!” Her voice trembled strangely. She placed her hand, quivering with excitement and emotion, on a nearby chair to steady herself. He turned quickly

at her call and the expression of pain in his face almost completed her undoing. "My lord surely will not leave me to go in to dinner alone? The nobles—the ladies—the King—what would they think and say?"

Instantly he came to her side, and bowed low before her as he proffered his arm. "Your pardon, Princess, will you permit me?"

She quivered beneath the scorn in his tone, her eyes closed as if to shut out the unhappy picture he presented to her sensitive discernment. Her hand, which had been raised to her heart, fell to her side.

"Your scorn—Monsieur—is quite evident!" she said, slowly and proudly.

A metallic ring upon the marble floor beside them interrupted whatever else she would have said. Both started, and D'Antaurier stooped quickly. A moment later he glanced at the trinket which he had picked up.

"Give it me, my lord—" cried the Princess in terror, "immediately, Monsieur!"

But instead D'Antaurier knelt before her and seized her hand.

"Princess, Princess Helene!" he cried, joyously.

The next instant he had leapt to his feet and held her close in his arms, and she yielded herself willingly at last to his embrace.

"Thou wearest my picture near thy heart—"

he exulted, "and now I know! My dream is not past, Helene. Nay, it has just begun. And now I dare—I dare—not only to speak my love but to claim the rose—to *claim the rose!* Princess, the rose! *My rose!*"

She gloried in the triumph of his tone, and she put her hand to the rose in her hair, but he, with a laugh which told the depth of joy in his heart, stooped and kissed the rose of her trembling lips.

"A messenger to see Her Highness, the Princess Helene."

At the announcement the Princess started guiltily, and her cheeks were crimson as she turned to face the soldier just entering. Lord D'Antaurier quickly moved away to leave her free to await the messenger.

The soldier knelt reverently before her but did not lift the hood which concealed his face. Speaking no word, he handed her a parchment. The Princess smiled her thanks even while she regarded the man curiously. As she broke the seal she still studied him, then, remembering that while she could not see his emotions, hers were visible to him during her reading, she addressed him gently:

"If Monsieur will await my answer in the ante-room."

Immediately the soldier arose and, with a bow to her, followed the page from the room.

Dreamily D'Antaurier watched Helene's face as she read, and he rejoiced to behold its calm happiness. Then suddenly he saw her lips part in fear; her whole countenance express anxiety. With a despairing cry she went to him.

"Monsieur—my lord—our dream is over!"

"Princess!"

"Listen, my lord, this comes from one of my most trusted friends, one who reports to me all matters of *grande importance*, and all dangers. This is his warning: 'Le Capitaine today sends a message to the King. He has in his possession documents which the King values—which would mean riot and bloodshed should Le Capitaine use them. The latter accordingly demands that His Majesty shall command you, the Princess Helene, and the Comte of Angoulême to wed. The King's answer must be given within three days. If you and my lord—'" She could read no more, but the noble took up the sentence.

"If you and my Lord—D'Antaurier," he echoed, "would wed, you must do so at once," he finished. "Well, Princess, and that is not hard. It is for Your Highness to say. Yours is the choice. Wilt marry me, Helene?"

"How can we wed. The King cannot consent. He dare not!" she cried in anguish. "Ah, my lord, it is too late—too late! Your desire—my dream—our love—"

“Hush, sweetheart, thou shalt not say it, for there is a way. Listen, dear, I had not dared to tell thee this before. Tonight when I found thy message awaiting me six leagues away a great hope sprang up within my heart. I knew that thou didst fear for my safety and also that in thy need thou didst turn to me for aid. I came to thee as fast as horse could bring me, hoping, praying, glorying in the dream thy dear message brought. And I gloried the more for I had found the means to save thee if thou wouldst grant me that great privilege. Long ago when I returned from Toulouse successful in the mission upon which His Majesty had sent me, he bade me choose my reward for my service—which he looked upon as worthy—and I dared to ask his consent to our marriage, Helene, provided I should win thy love and favorable answer. This consent he gave to me in writing, and that precious parchment now is in the possession of my cousin, the Lady LeRoi, of whom thou hast heard.”

“I know,” interrupted the Princess. “It was from her I obtained this locket containing thy picture.”

“Ah, Helene, how thou hast played with me, when all the while thou didst care! Thou hast been a cruel lady, but now—thou dost atone most gloriously! And as for this

consent which means so much to us, my cousin keeps it for me till I call for it. I could not keep it myself. There are spies and enemies ever dogging my steps. I could not take it with me wherever I went for I encounter too many dangers, and if death had come to me and it had been found upon me, it might have imperiled the King or thee, dear heart."

"Monsieur—my lord!" she cried gladly, so gladly that he kissed her, "but how will this avail us? What can we do?"

"Then thou art not angry at my temerity in thus asking the King's consent?"

"Nay, nay, I love thee!"

"And thou wilt come with me to be wed by some humble priest? Thou wilt steal away and join me? Thou wilt trust me?"

"Yea, yea, with my life, my soul, my honor! Only take me with thee, for where thou art there is my happiness. Do not let them part us. I cannot wed the Prince."

"My love—my life—my dream come true! My rose of hope and promise!" he said, brokenly. A moment of reverie and he raised his head in decision. "Ah, would that Jean were here to take a message to Lady LeRoi! We must act quickly, or not at all. Three days!"

The soldier at his first words had entered the room, and now he came to the noble's

elbow, threw back his hood, and spoke in a far different tone than before:

"You have a message for Lady LeRoi, my lord?"

"Jean."

The soldier bowed, laughing at his surprise. "Even I, my Lord D'Antaurier."

"This is indeed rare fortune. Pray take this message to my cousin, that she meet me three miles beyond the causeway—you know the place, Jean—at ten tomorrow night, and that she bring the paper which I entrusted to her care, and also, Jean, the documents which she guards for—the highest person—you know whom, Jean. She will understand."

"Yea, my lord. Shall she need attendants, think you?"

"Nay, there is no danger, I believe, but do you accompany her, rather than some other. I should feel easier."

"Very well, my lord. Tomorrow night, then, at ten, or thereabout, three miles beyond the causeway. My Lady LeRoi and I will be there."

D'Antaurier held out his hand. To the Princess's surprise this nobleman shook hands with a servant. As Jean, with a low bow to Helene, left the room, the noble turned to her, saying:

"Princess, I have a plan which will mean

much for us. Lady LeRoi has in her possession papers which the King believes to have gone astray and which he fears are in the hands of his enemies. She had been awaiting an opportunity to send them to those to whom they are addressed. But now when we are wed we will return with them to the King, and perchance his pleasure in their recovery will grant us pardon for our disobedience.

“But come, dinner has long been served. I will dine with thee, Helene, and then I must go to make ready for my journey tomorrow, and for the furtherance of our plan. I shall not come to the palace again, but through Jean or M. Beaumon will get thee word when and where to meet me, and then, Princess, and then—”

“I will come, even across the world,” she answered bravely.

CHAPTER III

The Wandering Jester

At the entrance of the banquet hall a strange and wondrous figure paused. Yet in these days of varied pleasures the sight was not unusual, nay, rather, it introduced the incident of mirth and amusement. The guards of His Majesty's service looked upon the jester with undisguised interest for he was one unknown to them and therefore promised novelty. His cap and bells were odd indeed even for that style of oddity, and the latter jingled with his every move in a persistent and ludicrous manner. A cap of yellow; bells of many hues; a crimson jacket, short and closely fitted; trousers of delicate blue, and shoes—or rather boots, for they were long, leathern affairs which covered the bottom of his trouser legs—of brilliant pink; thus was the stranger arrayed who demanded admission to the court assemblage. And he did not ask in vain, for this form of entertainment was pleasing to His Majesty who, however, did not care to have a jester of the court, as did many kings.

"Wherefore this mad show of hoggish greed!" was his first remark to those who guarded the door, "Pray let me enter and admonish these mistaken mortals lest they eat and afterward repent. For verily I do believe that I can do them service which will save them from the practise of the court physician, and what other does this mean but that I save their useless, but personally precious, lives?"

The guardsmen grinned; but one made sturdy answer, "*Ma foi*, what have we here who claims to be able to cheat death himself! His modesty is touching, and must needs be rewarded; yet first I would know in what manner he would admonish the assembly for its welfare?"

"First and foremost, then, since you would learn at the foot of fools"—deftly the jester raised his foot and smartly touched the guardsman in the hip so that he bent in self-defense, which caused his comrades to laugh uproariously—"I shall suggest that the wayfarer who brings them cheer be given, in his turn, a share of theirs; for thus in robbing them of temporary pleasure so also do I save them from prolonged pangs of gluttony. And now that you have satisfied your curiosity, pray let me pass."

"Ho, ho!" laughed one, "he fears to tell us

more of his great secrets lest we also play the fool and lose for him his occupation." In his glee the speaker pushed his comrade and shouted at his own brilliancy.

But the jester only eyed him sadly, and quoth gravely, "Nay, do not thus delude thyself with vain hope of greatness, for thou wilt always play the fool without the trying; but alas 'tis not the part which needeth wit, being of that common kind which we encounter upon all sides, and which by its possessor is not recognized."

'Twas now the others' turn to laugh at their comrade's keen discomfiture and the latter muttered sullenly, "*Entrez*, O fool, His Majesty will rejoice at thy coming! None who is thy equal in cleverness has been seen at court for many a day, and now I speak of lords of the realm as well as those who wear thy motley colors."

The grotesque figure glided swiftly across the marble floor, and many nobles smiled upon him as he passed; but the first knowledge which the King had of his presence was the weird jingle of bells above his head. Startled, His Majesty turned, only to encounter the bold gaze of most impudent eyes.

"How now, sirrah!" he roared in pretended anger, "is this the way you greet your King and master?"

The jester pursed his lips thoughtfully, and cocked his head mockingly. "Master, say you, O strange one?" he queried slowly. "How now! There is only one who is my master, and he the devil. Hast thou met him?" He leaned eagerly toward him. "Or mayhap you are he, here in a new disguise!"

The King drew his brows to scowl upon the fellow, but instead his lips relaxed, and he smiled upon him. "Verily, you are a new arrangement!" he exclaimed as he viewed his costume. "Well, you are welcome, so long as you guard your impudence."

"Sire, I will guard you with my life!" cried the jester fervently, and the King joined heartily in the laugh against himself.

After a moment the fool drew apart from the King and viewed those among the nobles, and presently his eyes lighted and he made his graceful way to Lord D'Antaurier. So smoothly and quietly did he move that neither the nobleman nor the Princess who sat beside him knew of his presence. Indeed, D'Antaurier's eyes were fastened upon Helene, nor did he realize how he drank in her beauty, so absorbed was he in his happiness. Then the mocking bells chimed beside him, and the jester cried gleefully:

"My lord! My lord! Pray stare not so upon the lady, for she is not a ghost but as

dainty a piece of flesh and blood as ever mine eyes have viewed."

The courtiers faced him laughingly and Helene's cheeks grew crimson beneath their significant gaze.

"That, also, is my opinion, fool," returned the nobleman, readily. "Hence I look at her, and shall continue in my study, notwithstanding that thereby I place myself upon a level with a fool in his opinion. For once his judgment gives him credit of a wiser head than one would dream was beneath so weird a covering."

"Bravo, my lord!" cried the King. "Verily, this fool must look to his laurels if he means to spar with you!"

The jester merely shrugged, then murmured plaintively, "I pray thee, gentlemen, to spare the lady's blushes. 'Tis unfair advantage to war upon a woman."

As he moved away, Lord D'Antaurier looked after him wonderingly, and then the jester faced him, and seeing his puzzled expression, eyed him boldly, defiantly, and at last shook his baton mockingly, and swung on his heels.

"I have seen this man somewhere," D'Antaurier said in a low tone to Helene. "I know that I have looked into those same brazen eyes and I believe that he, too, recognized me."

"He stood just outside the door of the throne-room as we passed to this dining-hall," she made answer. "I saw him in the shadow."

A strange light came into the noble's face. "I wonder—" he began, then paused for he feared to frighten her, but Helene had guessed his thought.

"If he heard us?" she questioned. "It would not be improbable. He whom thou callest Jean came to thee because he heard thy wish."

"Let us not believe this," returned D'Antaurier quietly, "for unless he is a spy of His Majesty's, there is nothing to fear."

"Nevertheless, it were well to take precautions," she advised.

The noble nodded his acquiescence.

The King arose and gave the signal for the return to the throne-room, but as Helene also arose he addressed her in a tone so distinct and cold that all watched him with startled eyes.

"I pray that Your Highness will not hurry. I am aware that you did not begin dinner with the rest, and I would not have you leave before you have ended. You, also, my Lord D'Antaurier, I beg that you finish your repast."

Helene blushed with wounded pride. "Accept my thanks, Sire," she responded icily.

"I was detained by a messenger. Naturally my escort, the Lord D'Antaurier, awaited my leisure."

The King merely bowed, but behind the Princess's chair there sounded a low, deriding laugh. The jester whirled his baton gaily, then hurried after the King.

"Have a care, Sirrah," cried King Louis: "twice have you played a jest upon the Princess Helene, and a third will cost you dear. Verily, you shall be hung up by your heels."

"So that it be not by my neck I care not, O strange one. But tell me, does she then know the devil that you defend her thusly?"

The King eyed him in amazement at his daring. "By my faith!" he exclaimed, "I wonder if perchance you are not near the truth, for it would seem that if things continue as they now tend, there will indeed be the devil to pay!"

As M. Beaumon passed Lord D'Antaurier's chair the latter quietly pulled his sleeve. Instantly M. Beaumon made an awkward movement with his arm which caused Marguerite's fan to fall from her grasp. With polite apologies he stooped to recover it, and D'Antaurier, understanding the ruse, bent and whispered cautiously:

"Return to us in ten minutes."

“Very well, my lord,” was M. Beaumon’s whispered response, as he restored Marguerite’s fan.

Nevertheless it was fully half an hour after the King had given the signal for the return to the throne-room that it was observed that the Princess and Lord D’Antaurier were still absent from the assembly.

It was with a grim smile that the King noted their protracted absence, and even the jester’s countless efforts failed to rouse him from his gloomy reverie. Then at last came welcome interruption to his unhappy thoughts. The page announced the arrival of the Prince, Francis, Comte of Angoulême. Eagerly the King awaited his coming, for deep in his stern heart he knew that he loved this cousin, who represented in his strong, youthful appearance all manliness and gallantry of a prince of men. Proudly he noted the interest which his cousin’s approach had excited, and he smiled with pleasure when at last the Prince crossed the threshold and stood bowing graciously to welcoming courtiers. The King was justly proud of his youthful cousin. Like the Princess Helene’s, Francis of Angoulême’s mother had been of English extraction, and he had inherited from her people his medium coloring and fine physique, which set him apart in a court where birth was so truly

shown in dark eyes and hair as well as the lesser stature which are the characteristics of the French race. The King's eyes roved over the strong, well-knit figure with its stately carriage, and grace, thence to the merry face with its large, somewhat mournful, hazel eyes and the firm, wilful mouth. Clothed in a suit of white satin, his light brown hair falling in heavy curls to his shoulders, medals of gold and of colors gleaming on his breast, Francis, Comte of Angoulême, was a splendid specimen of handsome manhood as he bowed and swung low his broad and long-plumed hat. Moreover, his laughing manner, his charming gallantries, his mockeries, his smiles, all won him friends. Yet to each and every one he presented the carefree air of a mocker. His smile was mocking; his eyes gleamed with mockery; his whole form swayed and bent with a subtle mockery; and few indeed guessed how much his manner was the mask of a suppressed sorrow and unhappiness.

The King arose as his cousin approached, and saluted him.

"I give thee greeting, Cousin," he said, and his voice was newly kind.

"I am at your service, Sire," was the Comte's half laughing response.

"Help us, then, to make merry this night, Comte of Angoulême. Afterward—"

"I accept the charge, Your Highness. 'Afterward,' Sire—" the Comte repeated significantly as he bowed and turned away to greet the nobles. Continuing on his merry way, he laughingly raised the ladies' hands toward his lips, only to relinquish them untouched, and at his skill the noblewomen smiled in flattered approval. Yet all the while he made his way to Lady Marguerite's side as surely as if her presence were a magnet. But when he reached her he had no mockeries with which to greet her, only speaking cordially and in a manner which plainly showed an unusual spirit of friendship. It were as if some unwonted shyness, or mayhap respect, overcame him in her nearness.

Before he could enter into conversation, the jester glided stealthily to his side and tapped him impudently upon the arm.

"Good even, oh, mocking one!" he cried. "So thou hast come at last to enliven the waiting throng with gallantries."

"That were more to thy duty," retorted the Comte quickly, "for what other use does the fool play amongst us!"

"Then we are cousins," cried the other, smirking.

"Mayhap nearer related than that, my friend."

"Ho, ho! Not quite the fool that I had

thought. No fool doth recognize his foolishness, and thus thou provest wisdom."

"Mayhap the time will come when I shall know so well my foolishness that I shall dare to don the garb of fool even as thou hast done, rash jester."

"Hast thou a medal for thine wisdom or, mayhap, for thine impudence?" The jester poked his medals with a far from easy touch.

"Not yet, but if I talk with thee, I soon shall acquire a gift for the latter. 'Tis always the evil ways which are easiest learned, as thou no doubt hast found. If impudence is rewarded by medals why, forsooth, thou couldst fashion thyself a garment from them which would rival in size and length any coat we see tonight."

"And I maintain, O mocking one, a fool's a fool, of which more anon." With a hand-spring the jester made his adieux; but as he went, the hardness in his eyes belied his jesting and gave token of some hidden meaning for his address.

"The Lady Montarson does not seem to be in attendance," said the Prince.

"Nay, Comte of Angoulême. The Princess is still at dinner I believe."

"And the assembly is dull," he laughed.

"Until Your Highness came," she ridiculed in return. "When Your Highness arrives

dullness departs from all noblewomen, my lord."

"All?" he questioned derisively, as he studied her serious face.

"All who have been dull, my lord, I should have said. Some of us are never dull."

"True. Your wit, my Lady Montarson, proves to me its lack of dullness."

At this moment the Princess, escorted by M. Beaumon, at last entered the throne-room and made her way to Marguerite's side. King Louis's eyes lighted at sight of her, and he watched her closely for many minutes. Meanwhile the Prince greeted her in the same gallant fashion which characterized his treatment of all women of court. Then once more he faced Marguerite, and continued his conversation where he had been interrupted.

"I trust, Lady Marguerite, that my jesting has not forfeited me a favor at your hands. My mood is craving for a song, a song such as only you can sing." His mockery was vanished now, and the girl read aright the sadness in his tone—a sadness she had learned to understand, and which she knew he showed only to her, being ever gallantly merry in all other society.

She took her harp from his hands and seated herself in a low chair beside the window. The Prince took his place near her, where he

could view her countenance, yet remained screened from the gaze of courtiers by his position. Even as Marguerite touched the strings preparatory to beginning her song, however, an officer in uniform approached the throne, and she waited that he might be heard.

"Monsieur," the king bade him speak.

"Sire, you desired the presence of my Lord D'Antaurier. I sought him to deliver Your Highness's letter, and he is not in the palace or its vicinity."

"He has left!" cried the King in surprise, and instinctively he looked toward the Princess. "That must be a mistake, Monsieur. I bade him see me before his departure." Still his gaze was fixed upon Helene.

"Sire!" She came forward proudly, unflinchingly. "It is indeed true that Lord D'Antaurier is no longer at the palace. He received a message which called him away at once. I was at dinner with him at the time, and he left me to Monsieur Beaumon's escort."

"Your Highness does not know the contents of the message?"

"No, Sire, methought it was to do with his recent mission."

The King smiled upon her satirically. Then he faced Lord DeChatton, and cried with sudden sharpness:

“My Lord DeChatton, do you send a messenger at once to Lord D’Antaurier’s lodgings, bidding him await my pleasure here at the palace before he sleeps this night.”

DeChatton bowed. “Your Majesty!” he murmured, and left the room.

Marguerite watched Helene questioningly, but the Princess only smiled and let her hand fall caressingly upon her friend’s shoulder.

“Thou wert about to sing, Marguerite?”

“Yea.”

“Then let us enjoy it also.” The Princess glanced at the Prince and found him regarding her strangely. She looked down instantly and her face became cold almost to disdain. The Prince turned away from her with a sigh, and gazed out upon the dark gardens.

Marguerite touched her harp gently, and then once more her sweet voice broke the silence which filled all the room after His Majesty’s order.

“When night falls in dreamy silence
On the garden sweet with flowers,
And I seek in sad compliance
To vain longings, scented bowers,
Then deep in my heart’s recesses,
Thoughts wake pleading to be heard,
Nature soothes with soft caresses
And my soul’s with wonder stirred.

“In the shadows and the gloaming
Music falling clear and light,
Then I dream my soul's deep dreaming,
Follow fancy's playful sprite.
Longings fill me 'neath the magic,
Longings which I recognize,
And though wakening spells the tragic
I bid love to tyrannize.”

The charm her plaintive words cast held all hearers silent, and many moments passed before any sound was heard; and then the Prince came to her side. “I thank you, Lady Montarson,” he said in a voice that thrilled her. “You have filled my need, yet left me hungering for that which makes it.”

She looked into his face with a gaze so full of kindly understanding that he felt a throb new and strange to his heart. “My lord,” she said gently, and for some reason her tone brought a balm for his sadness, “the time will come when that need will be filled—by the only one who can ever really fill it.”

He smiled but shook his head. “I dare not hope,” he said, as he turned away.

The Princess looked after him in wonder, her face alight with a new thought. “Marguerite!” she exclaimed at last, “thou only hast read his heart! I see it now. His gallantry, his mockery, are but masks. In reality—”

"In reality, Helene, he is as true and fine a man as ever lived. He is a Prince, has power, rank, wealth, friends mayhap, everything indeed but that he craves—love."

The Princess nodded reflectively. "I believe I can like him now," she said slowly. "Marguerite, I understand, too, why thou badst me wear a rose. Thou didst plan even then to sing thy song of roses."

"Your Highness does not chide me for my temerity?" asked Marguerite, in pretended humility.

The Princess smiled upon her happily, and her voice faltered as she said:

"Nay, Maguerite, thou knowest that I have thee to thank for my great happiness. Thy friendship, thy tenderness, thy playfulness have been my joy since thy coming. May heaven bless and guard thee, dear, and bring to thee thy gladness once again."

A silence fell upon them, which presently was rudely broken.

"Permit me to pay my respects to my successor as entertainer of the court." The jester shook his bells in Marguerite's ear.

Before Marguerite could answer, had she so desired, the Prince, who had followed the fool, addressed him half angrily:

"Have a care, fellow," he said as he eyed him piercingly, "else we relieve you of your

disguise and show you to be a bigger fool than even the motley proves you."

A flood of crimson swept the jester's face, and he cast a startled glance upon the Prince. Then slowly the color receded, and his countenance portrayed an expression almost akin to relief. His wonted impudence returned, and he stepped impishly toward his threatener. He shook his baton in the Prince's face warningly and rakishly.

"Never fear, Monsieur Mocker, love is for fools, and thou shalt have thy share before many moons."

With this parting shot which did not miss the mark as the Prince's confusion proved, the jester spun on his toes, and uttering a defiant laugh which caused many hearers to shudder in distaste, he sped toward the throne.



“ ‘ Have a care, fellow, else we relieve you of your disguise and show you to be a bigger fool than even the motley proves you ’ ”

CHAPTER IV

The Summons

“My Lord DeChatton, you delivered my message to the Comte of Angoulême?”

“Yea, Sire, several hours since. Your Majesty saw him in the assembly room to-night, and he awaits your service at nine-thirty this evening.”

“That is well. And my Lord D’Antaurier?”

Lord DeChatton knew perfectly well that the King had exchanged words with the Prince which had assured his audience that night, and thus he realized that this preface only led up to the real question which troubled him.

“Lord D’Antaurier was not at his lodgings, Sire. My messenger gave Your Highness’s order to his serving-man and then each set forth to find my lord.”

“Ah! So my lord was not at his lodgings!” the King remarked grimly.

“Nay, Sire, and his man informed me that he doubted if his master would return this evening. He—”

“Not return tonight!” Louis interrupted

anxiously. "My lord, I tell you that I must see D'Antaurier this evening. *Sacré*, he must be found if it takes all the army to locate him. Have I not loyal subjects to heed my will, or must *I* go forth to gain my desires?"

DeChatton hid a smile which the King's temper provoked. "I was not aware, Your Highness, that the matter was so urgent. I will give immediate orders for more messengers to trace him."

The King noted his sarcasm and bit his lips angrily. As he was about to rebuke him a page entered.

"His Highness, the Comte of Angoulême."

For an instant the King was sullen, then an amused smile curved his lips, and he sank back into his chair.

"Bid the Prince enter; and you, my lords,"—he turned to his gentlemen—"may retire for the present."

As the nobles withdrew, the Prince came forward toward the King.

"My lord," said His Majesty in greeting.

"Your Highness sent for me?"

"Yea, Cousin Francis, and on a matter touching vitally upon your personal happiness."

The Comte smiled mockingly. "I trust, Sire, that Le Capitaine's name is not to be mentioned."

The King arose and his eyes gleamed angrily. "Le Capitaine! Le Capitaine! What meanest thou? What knowest thou of him? What can he have to do with fortunes of kings and princes?"

The Prince still smiled imperturbably. "Much, Sire, or so he seems to believe."

"How heard you, Comte, of his latest demand?"

The other lifted his eyebrows inquiringly, and responded jauntily, "His latest, Sire? Is there then a latest? Methinks the rascal grows bold."

The King sank back in his chair wearily, and dropped his imperious manner. "Aye, he grows bold, and I, Duc of Orleans, so-called 'the invincible,' am powerless to scorn him."

The Prince became serious. "Your Majesty! Sire, you have but to command me. Surely the throne is not imperiled. This traitor does not assail Your Highness?"

"Yea, but he does, and as I said, Cousin, I am powerless, I, even I, King Louis XII of France!" He laughed bitterly.

"What does he demand, Sire?"

"Not an impossible thing. Nay, even a wise one, mayhap; for this much I will concede. Not only he and the people who rise at his voice would rejoice in its consummation, but even the nobles highest in the land and

most loyal to the throne would not be displeased. Yea, Cousin, even I might have cause to smile upon it if it were not a demand of this villain who wishes me harm."

Francis had been watching the King shrewdly and had foreseen the result of his preface. Consequently he laughed harshly as he asked:

"And this demand, Sire, upon which you could smile if suggested by so popular a noble as—well—let us say, my Lord D'Antaurier?" he suggested, significantly.

The King half arose as he uttered a cry of amazement. "Comte, has a wizard's power been granted you, or are you mad, that you mock me? To mention Lord D'Antaurier's name now! Why, man, his fortune as well as your own and mine is in the balance. You torture me. You play upon my terror. You conjure up his name to strike my heart with fear. Even now I hear the spears and weapons beating upon the castle-gate. I hear the shrieks and moans of the mob crying for my blood—and yours—and Lord D'Antaurier's—aye, and of the Princess Helene's as well! I hear the thunder of the stamping throng, the murder in their raging cries, the horror of clanking swords! Yea, I see all Paris a mass of devouring flame, riot, and fire, and death let loose in a hell incarnate. My throne trembles, the palace upheaves,

and I am falling, falling with the mighty ruin, and over me bends the evil, gloating, triumphant face of that fiend who rouses Paris to this pitch. He gloats, and smiles, and mocks—and then—and then—!”

His voice sank to a whisper. His countenance was distorted with fear, and he fell back into his seat, his fingers clutching his throat.

The Prince burst into a merry laugh. “My lord!—my lord, permit me to pay homage to your powers of acting. Long have I known your cleverness as warrior, statesman, diplomatist, but never before have I realized your vast powers of simulation. And now for the demand, Sire, which shall keep your throne from trembling in this frightful fashion!” The sarcasm in his tone was cutting.

The King allowed his hand to fall slowly to his side, and he gazed upon his cousin with new admiration in his eyes. He marveled at the accuracy with which the Prince had pierced his ruse. Knowing his cousin’s friendship, he had sought to win consent to this demand, thus keeping peace with his enemies, by playing upon his sympathy. The Prince had been too shrewd for his method. He dropped his mask, and said coldly:

“That you wed the Princess Helene.”

Francis bowed and though he still smiled, his eyes glittered, as he replied distinctly,

"Your Highness was right in saying that it affected my personal happiness—"

The King interrupted eagerly, "Cousin, consider; you are no longer young; neither have you found one to whom you have given your love. Here in France there is one woman only who is your equal in birth. What, then, more fitting than that you and she should unite in friendly, if not loving, marriage? You, as I say, are no longer youthful. She, on the other hand, is beautiful, accomplished and amiable; in fact, will make a wife for you whom all the world will honor and admire."

"I do not question it. In fact no one can tell me of the Princess Helene's many excellent qualities. I respect and appreciate her. Unfortunately for your desire, I do not love her. Nor does she love me. Unlike myself, however, she has given her love elsewhere; while I have yet to find the woman whom I could love as well as admire."

"The more reason why you should not be averse to this marriage."

"Your Highness is mistaken in my character. Because I shall not suffer disappointment in such a union does not mean that I shall not lower myself in my own self-esteem. It is as well that Your Majesty should know something of my opinions, then you will understand why I cannot agree with you in

this matter. Perhaps one would not guess from my appearance that I have cherished certain ideals which have become my law of existence, and which I cannot violate at this late day. Strange as it may seem, since I have dwelt in a court where most emotions are superficial, I believe in love; not love which amuses itself for passing pleasure, not love which lies in mere comradeship and congenial friendship, but a love which surpasses all else in endurance, in beauty, in forbearance, in faith, in trust, and in peace. Your Majesty will term me a sentimentalist. That does not appall me. I have hoped for such love, believed in its existence, and still dream of it; and I do not intend to place a barrier which shall make it impossible of attainment. My first duty is to myself, to the self-respect which I have kept inviolate. My second is to this woman whom you would have me wed while I do not love her. She does love, even as I hope some day to do, and I shall not rob her of her happiness. Your Highness has not questioned her feeling in the matter, I should judge, if certain events in the throne-room are to be considered indicative."

"You mean her evident friendliness toward my Lord D'Antaurier? I doubt if the Princess Helene would so far forget her rank as to marry beneath her. I rely on her good sense in this crisis."

The King's new dignity became him well. Nevertheless the Prince was not impressed, for when he answered, his manner once more was openly deriding.

"Many thanks, Sire. My good sense has seldom been in evidence, I admit, yet I have been foolish enough to believe that our personal happiness was not so trivial a matter that a 'friendly marriage' should constitute our greatest aim. Let me further remark that good sense from my view-point bids me retain my own self-respect at least enough to refuse to countenance this absurd sacrifice of my own and the Princess's future contentment. I am fully aware that such a view-point is not in keeping with the highly honorable methods of this trivial court. Still I repeat to Your Highness, that I shall not be a party to this arrangement. I will marry when and where I please, but the woman of my choice is not Princess Helene, nor am I the man of hers."

"And I say, Comte of Angoulême, that you shall wed the Princess!" The King, pale with anger, stepped down from the dais.

"Her Highness, the Princess Helene!"

"Sire, I must agree with the Comte of Angoulême in this matter. I thank him for his defense of my principles as well as of his own." The Princess approached the Comte,

and held out her hand to him. He flashed a kindly glance upon her as he bent and kissed it.

"Your Highness heard our discussion, then." The King had partially regained his self-control.

"Enough of it to know what reason Your Highness had for requesting my presence."

"Then there is no need to repeat my purpose. May I ask why Your Highness looks upon this request with disfavor?"

"I think Your Majesty has guessed the reason. There was a time, Sire, when you did not refuse my Lord D'Antaurier permission to marry me."

"He has told you this, then?"

"He has told me everything that I should know."

"Even that he loves thee, I should judge."

"Of which, Sire, I am not only glad but proud," returned Helene unflinchingly, as she defied her sovereign's gaze.

"Yet this in my mind is the only thing I have against the noble. As a man I admire and trust him. As your suitor, he is impossible. His rank is far below your own."

"Am I to understand, Your Majesty, that you have previously granted consent to the marriage of my Lord D'Antaurier to Princess Helene?"

Something in the Prince's challenge as he

stepped toward the King made the other fall back a pace, and a startled expression came into his countenance.

"So long ago, Cousin, that it is easily withdrawn," he replied, haughtily.

"Nevertheless, I hold a promise a promise. Another of my oddities, Your Highness," he went on derisively, "and, accordingly, I say now, once and for all, I refuse to wed the Princess Helene. I believe she will pardon me the seeming rudeness." He turned to her with a smile and bow, then again faced the King and continued bitinglly: "I am surprised, Sire, that you submit thusly to the demand of such a villian as *Le Capitaine*."

His scorn stung the King to white heat of wrath. "It is my wish as well as his; and I tell you, *Comte of Angoulême*, that you shall obey me in this matter. I am your sovereign, and, though I have loved you well, you shall do as I bid or pay the penalty of the traitor. Leave me now. Unless your answer tomorrow is in accord with my demand, we shall come to a better understanding of my authority."

With a gesture he dismissed them. The Princess turned silently away, but her eyes were wide with horror. The Prince stared at his sovereign steadily, and his lips were white from anger.

"Sire, yours is the power," he spoke in a

voice that almost hissed in his effort for control. "Yet this much I say unto you, your command shall never be obeyed by me. From this day forth I shall never look upon your face willingly. I bid you farewell."

Without so much as a salute, he swung on his heel. But at the door his face relaxed as he held aside the drapery for the Princess to pass out. Always gallant, he remained even now the perfect gentleman of France.

"Let me bid Your Highness goodbye," he said half sadly. "And let me add, Princess Helene, that for your attitude this night, I honor you. I wish you all joy in your love, and trust that it may ever be yours."

"I thank you, Prince," the Princess's voice was sweet with a new understanding. "It is indeed imperative that I should thank you for the service you have done me this night. I shall always think of you with kindness, and with the wish that you may sometime know the happiness which love has brought to me."

The drapery fell behind her, but in that last glance each thrilled with a newly-acquired friendship.

"Cousin Francis," the King's voice quivered with suppressed fury.

Instantly the Prince's face was tense with its former anger.

"Sire," he cried bitterly, "there can be nothing further between us. I have told you my purpose, and now once again I say—*farewell!*"

"Francis!" A second time the King roared out his name, and he crossed the room quickly toward his cousin.

An instant later the drapery fell with a quiet shiver. The Prince had gone, ignoring his sovereign's call. When the King reached the doorway he found the great ante-room deserted. A moment he stared unbelievingly, and his face was blank with amazement.

"He dared!" he whispered. "He dared! Verily, he is a man to respect and admire!"

CHAPTER V

The Searchers and What They Found

“Yea, Monsieur, it is here that we shall find many of Le Capitaine’s men, and mayhap a clue of where our lad is wandering. I know it looks formidable, but sometimes where least we think to find knowledge there we come upon it. Missions in these troublous days carry the best of men to wondrous quarters. Even as we come, so may he in pursuit of his undertaking.”

“Lead on, friend, though these slimy streets are not to my liking still you may be right and I will gladly follow in the hope.”

The two noblemen picked their way through the poorer district of the slums of Paris. A drizzling rain had set in that morning, but as it had neared nightfall, the weather had cleared, leaving all the country refreshed and fragrant, except here where filth and slime had only been accentuated. Moreover, the men they passed were soldiers or unkempt specimens fresh from grog-shops, and smelling evilly of their vile surroundings. These glanced

curiously at the two seekers who, although garbed in poor costumes, affecting to disguise their rank, still showed plainly certain qualities which set them apart from this rabble of Paris.

Eagerly each scanned the face of every passerby, vainly hoping to stumble upon the one they sought, and thinking, mayhap, to find him in some disguise. For an hour they wandered, ever entering farther into the dingy sections. At last, when about to despair, they came upon at least an interesting diversion.

In the distance sounded cries of anger and terror, and the thud of muffled blows.

"What is it?" asked DeChatton, anxiously.

"A street fight, perhaps," responded M. Beaumon. "Suppose we investigate."

As he spoke, he hurried his pace and DeChatton followed his example. In a moment they had broken into a run, for it was plain from the sounds which reached them that the fray was becoming momentarily more serious. A sudden turn in the road brought them to a halt. Three men of evil appearance were pummeling a fourth whom they had thrown into the gutter, and they were evidently much pleased with their success in eliciting frightened yells from their victim. Other soldiers and loiterers watched the conflict delightedly,

making no move to help the fellow in his unequal fight.

"Hold, ye ruffians!" cried M. Beaumon in a frenzy of wrath, and he rushed upon the three assailants. "In the King's name what means this brawling? By my faith, but ye are cowards, three against one, and ye others onlookers!"

His strong right arm shot out, and before its might one of the men went sprawling into the gutter, whence he set up a howl which proved that he was the worse for liquor. DeChatton had not paused to reason nor to ask M. Beaumon what he did, but struck out valiantly, and a second soldier fell headlong into the street beside his comrade. The victim, thus given opportunity, struggled to his feet and grappled with the one remaining adversary. The crowd, delighting in the discomfiture of their erstwhile heros, burst into howls of laughter and cheers for the rescuers. But neither of the nobles stayed to listen to the tumult. In the confusion they hurried on their way, and had succeeded in making good their flight before their absence was noted. Only the rescued man followed and overtook them. He stammered his thanks and explained that because he, a stranger, had dared to criticize Le Capitaine he had been attacked by these, his partisans.

Gradually by clever questioning, DeChatton drew from him the fact that he was a follower of Le Capitaine, yet did not approve all his methods.

With a sudden inspiration M. Beaumon asked him concerning the favored men of this leader, and finally admitted that he was in search of a friend who was one of Le Capitaine's men.

The other, still grateful for his timely rescue, advised them to visit a certain nearby wine house where many of Le Capitaine's men met, and suggested that there they might find the man they sought, or happen upon some clue to his whereabouts. He offered to accompany them, and save them from the chance annoyance of Le Capitaine's men. This favor the nobles were only too glad to accept. Very shortly they found themselves in one of the lowest wine-houses of Paris, one reeking with all manner of vice and poverty, and in the discovery they gave up all hope of finding Victor de Belleamie that day. It was not in such a place as this that a man of his character would be found, they reasoned. And yet an hour sped by and still they waited, why they could not have told.

Finally a new party of soldiers entered the room, and made their noisy way to a table. M. Beaumon noted the gallant air with which

he who led the way seemed to command the others. His figure was strong and supple. Grace was in every line despite the poorly fitting soldier's suit. The carriage of his head, the finely chiselled features, both proclaimed him superior to his fellows. Each of the nobles noted the evident surprise of their companion in seeing him, in fact his manner became plainly agitated.

"There is a man who serves Le Capitaine and in a curious way. I warrant that this is the first time that he has been in Paris for years, except it be unknown to anyone. He dwells in the province of Blois, and once stood high in favor of King Louis XI and of the present King. Now he is His Majesty's bitter enemy and does all he can to help Le Capitaine, yet never has Le Capitaine looked upon his face to his knowledge. This was the arrangement by which this noble agreed to aid him, and Le Capitaine willingly complied, knowing well the value of his help at any price. He has remained in the province of Blois where he does all his work, communicating by trusted messengers with Le Capitaine and meeting his men only by night and in strange rendezvous. Why he follows this method, none can guess, yet his desire is not questioned nor his confidence betrayed. Mayhap it is because he once served at court, and

was a favorite with His Majesty. He is still a gallant and woos the ladies' favor. There are few who can equal him in soft flatteries and courtesies which win the women. But in this as in all things his manner covers a heart as cruel as a tiger's and as treacherous as a snake's. He is the Marquis de Monterrat."

The hope which had first sprung into being that he might be Victor, when they had noted his evident air of nobility, was succeeded by interest in his actual identity. Both had known him at the court in those days before his treachery had made King Louis XI his enemy, and he had been driven from his estates. Now they could not see his face clearly in the dim light, yet they watched him closely.

"You say that his coming here is unusual?" asked M. Beaumon. "Who, then, are these men with him? Not Le Capitaine's men surely, if he guards his identity in the manner you relate?"

"The Marquis has not been in this house for years to my certain knowledge. My home is in Blois and I have seen him almost daily for at least five years. His appearance here puzzles me. It proclaims to my mind some plan afoot of great importance. These men are his own followers, and tools, and in being his they are

indirectly Le Capitaine's. Some of them I know well, both here in Paris and in Blois."

"It is an odd story you tell us. Why he should not desire to have Le Capitaine know his face is indeed strange, but Le Capitaine's own identity is one of mystery."

The other smiled significantly. "There is a story," he said coldly, "that he is a son of King Louis XI, but not an acknowledged one."

"There are many stories, Monsieur," said DeChatton quickly, "told to injure rulers."

Moments passed, and in their interest in the converse of those around them they lost all knowledge of the speeding of time. The drinkers glanced at them curiously, but because they were accompanied by one whom they knew to be a comrade in Le Capitaine's service, they did not molest them. Songs and cheers, oaths and quarrels were the sum of their riotous pastime.

Suddenly over and above all voices there came an angry challenge.

"Thou liest, De Monterrat!" And a glass of wine was flung in the noble's face.

The Marquis sprang to his feet, his face white with fury. He had drunk enough to make him ugly and he now forgot all discretion. His own glass struck his accuser, and, with an oath which caused even these hardened

men to shudder, the Marquis drew his sword and rushed upon the other. The suddenness of his assault gave no opportunity for interference. The first speaker drew his sword in self-defense, and in an instant the two were fighting with all the vigor which anger roused to greatest brutality could inspire.

A moment and all was over. With an awful oath, and his face distorted by his beastly passion, the Marquis fell with a thud upon the wine-reeking floor, the blood spurt-
ing from a wound which numbered in moments his existence.

M. Beaumon and DeChatton were among the first to reach his side. The Marquis was fast sinking into unconsciousness, yet still his tongue framed curses upon his murderer. Then all at once the veil lifted, and he struggled to rise upon his elbow.

"Ye gods!" he gasped. "What have I done! Le Capitaine—tonight—my appointment—," he fell back gasping, and in his weakness could say no more.

A moment and he had breathed his last. His fellows, sobered by the tragedy, gazed in awe and fear upon his still body. For the first time his murderer awakened to the horror of his deed, and to realization of the anger of Le Capitaine which was sure to overtake him. In terror he sprang for the

entrance to escape. Eager hands strove to restrain him, but a stern voice bade them let him go, as the Marquis had been the first to draw sword. Thus did the wretch escape, and none could stay his flight.

Meanwhile M. Beaumon had bent over the Marquis to make sure of his death.

"My God!" he cried in amazement, and DeChatton quickly pressed to his side. "Look upon him, friend! What is this that we have found? It is the jester!"

Only for a moment did DeChatton look upon the murdered man, then his eyes, full of wondering uneasiness, sought his comrade's gaze.

"The jester of last evening," he whispered, repeating M. Beaumon's words unconsciously. "What can it mean? What was his purpose, think you, friend?"

M. Beaumon's lips curled scornfully, and his face was coldly stern as he answered readily: "Need we question its treachery, knowing him to be the King's enemy as we do?"

❧ "He played his part well—let us hope not too well," returned DeChatton in reluctant admiration. "He certainly aimed sharp thrusts at the Princess Helene and Lord D'Antaurier."

CHAPTER VI

The Meeting

A horseman made his way slowly up the hill on the outskirts of Paris. His thoughts given over to gloom and bitterness showed in a face stern and grave with man's responsibilities weighing heavily upon youth's shoulders. The picture before him meant nothing, even though all the surrounding country was aglow in an exquisite sunset, the more beautiful for that rain of the earlier part of the day which had left only more unsavory another portion of Paris. With unseeing eyes he journeyed until at last he reached the hill's very crest, and even then it was more from the will of his horse than from his own that he came to a halt. Some time passed and he was deep in thought, and when at length he did arouse from his reverie a bitter smile curved his lips, betokening that realization of his whereabouts brought no alleviation to his unhappiness. He noted his solitude only to feel relief, and in the same moment he glanced derisively at his peasant costume, so evidently a disguise.

His silhouette stood out sharply above the crest of the hill, and the flame of the setting sun danced and made merry with its loneliness.

Below lay Paris, now peaceful and quiet. The moodiness fell away from the man's countenance as he viewed it. Memories rushed upon him, bringing softness to his hard eyes. The past, the present, the future met and silently waited in that moment. In the past lay forebodings, disappointments, and pleasures; in the present a suspicious peace; in the future, perhaps less than forty-eight hours away, bloodshed, riot and revolution. The past of Paris he knew for it had been his. The present also he understood for it belonged to both. But the future would not be identical in that he would not be in Paris. For the city, would be disaster; for himself, suffering. In Paris for him lay ruin. Away from it lay despair. His gaze lingered lovingly on the roofs sparkling beneath him, then reluctantly passed beyond to a dim distance. Thus should he renounce Paris and seek an unknown land where he might dwell in peace if not in happiness. Spain and exile must be that goal. Before his distorted vision forms took shape, and at last from out the wavering masses which clustered near the sunset path he seemed to conjure up the blue hills of Spain

appearing like phantom isles as through a haze. So much had his mind dwelt this day upon his future.

"Monsieur is prompt," said a soft voice at his side.

The rider started and glanced in alarm upon the speaker. As he did so his hand involuntarily drew close his habit, and he averted his head the next instant. The other laughed, and remarked drily:

"It is past dusk, Monsieur, and moreover the disguise is perfect. One would believe the Marquis a young gallant of twenty or thereabout. *Sacré*, the Marquis de Monterrat himself would not know his dearly beloved son, *n'est-ce pas?*" the voice continued ironically. "Monsieur is silent. Another of the vagaries of his rôle? Or is it with lofty scorn for his rattlepate companion? But prattle aside; we must to work. Much is to do and few to do it. Are you ready, Marquis? Le Capitaine is in a hurry as the time draws near for us to act. A nasty task this. And all because a prince has dared to voice his own desires. If he had been less stubborn, there would have been no such attack upon a woman. Is he a dullard, or has another lady higher place within his heart? If such be the case, Monsieur, *ma foi!* it were dastardly to force his inclination. Yet the Princess is most pleasing

both in manner and appearance, and her character makes her deserving of the best that life can give. Why he does not appreciate her charms and the honor the King, his cousin, would do him in granting the alliance—”

“ ‘Granting?’ ” interrupted the Marquis mockingly, while he studied his companion furtively.

Evidently his scrutiny satisfied him, for the startled expression which the other’s coming had caused, disappeared, and his features became once more at rest. The rider was a man of about his own age, scarcely turning thirty, and typical of his race in his dark complexion and medium height. His face, however, while somewhat haggard and worn as if from the hard life of a soldier, was nevertheless rugged and strong, betokening courage and steadfast character. Instinctively the Marquis knew that he could be trusted, for his clear eyes returned his gaze frankly, if somewhat curiously.

“*Mais non—*” conceded his friend with a shrug, “ ‘commanding’ if Monsieur the Marquis prefers.”

“It is well mended, and now, *mon camarade*, tell me this, since you seem so fully aware of my lady’s virtues, what of my Lord D’Antaurier? Would you have the Princess throw

him aside like a worthless toy, now, at her King's command—in order to appease the cry of the people? Come, my friend, is it not a little unreasonable to demand that those of the nobility conform their lives to their subjects' wishes regardless of personal desires and happiness?"

"*Mon Dieu*"—the sigh that accompanied these words betokened mingled surprise and relief. "It is not often that the Marquis speaks so warmly and—pardon—so nobly. Do you know that I—that sometimes it has seemed to me—I have wondered—Monsieur the Marquis did not always so despise this new favorite, D'Antaurier. Let me whisper it, my friend, a right fine fellow if he *is* of the King's court. I trust I touch upon no sensitive point, Monsieur, in saying this. I merely speak in justice, not in friendship, to the noble. It's treason perhaps to say it and Monsieur Le Capitaine no doubt could tell me much concerning his villainies." He shrugged significantly and hurried on, "But for a man of my lord's position to aspire to the hand of a princess—surely he is not timid!" He changed his tone abruptly. "Ah, Monsieur! What is love! It can have no place in courts of kings and government intrigues, and D'Antaurier must have some good in him to have won the love of so rare a lady as the

Princess Helene. Alas, *mon camarade*, it is well you know not the '*divine passione*' since this night's work is before you. Look well, Marquis, upon Paris as it lies quiescent. Tomorrow its streets may be crimson with blood. We could say that we hold her destiny in our power. Does it not make a tremor in your soul at the thought? I would that we could pause and leave her future to other actors in the fray. The papers drawn up even as they were so long ago, must be in our hands before morning or the kingdom will be in arms and *glorieuse* France in revolution. And for paltry reason enough, surely! Because the King's cousin refuses to wed as his people demand. Because a cousin of Frederic D'Antaurier has in her possession the King's consent to his union with the Princess Helene. Another innocent item to cause a nation's peril, mayhap sorrow! But come, Mademoiselle passes the causeway in less than an hour and we must be there, we and our trusty blades. Forward, Monsieur."

"Cousins seem to be the villains of the affair," murmured the Marquis drily. Then he added simply, as he stifled a sigh, "Lead on, friend."

Outwardly calm, nonchalant, the very personification of his disguise as peasant, inwardly his thoughts in a tumult, the Marquis followed

his guide and half-amusedly awaited developments. His companion all unwittingly had given him a clue to the situation, and the innate recklessness of his nature, which had already brought him to the present pass, urged him to follow the course of events, regardless of consequences. Chief in his thoughts, however, was the fact that a woman was to be attacked. His heart leaped within him as he scented danger, and because a surprise lay in store for this comrade who believed in him so unquestioningly.

"It is here we were to meet Le Capitaine." As his companion halted, the Marquis promptly drew rein and looked searchingly into the pathway. Even as he gazed, four figures seemed to dissolve themselves from the blackness, and dimly visible though they were, a difference in uniform was evident, and the Marquis distinguished him whom they called Le Capitaine by the gleam of some medal on his breast. He could not see his face, but when Le Capitaine spoke, his voice proclaimed his authority.

"So, Marquis de Monterrat, you are ready. *Sacré!* a clever disguise, that of a peasant, is it not? I cannot see, since by your wish we meet in darkness, and here are your attendants, a right stout band. Mademoiselle reaches the causeway at nine with one servant.

Everything is arranged. You know what to do, and remember, the papers at any cost—all in the good cause—” With a salute returned by the Marquis, *Le Capitaine* vanished as quickly as he had come.

With a muttered order, the Marquis and his followers started silently over the route to the causeway. The night was dark and brooding, the moon having failed to make its appearance, yet the balmy sweetness of the air betokened rest and quiet not to be disturbed. Something of its peacefulness stole over the Marquis and filled him with a steadiness he had never before experienced. What his intention was he could not have told, yet his mind was clear and he calmly awaited whatever events the situation might bring forth. That there was every chance of death before him held no terrors, for, at least it would be in a good cause—not identical with that of *Le Capitaine*’s, however,—and even that were preferable to Spain and exile, or the other course, the King’s alternative.

As the riders reached the gloomy rendezvous, the signal of the Marquis was not needed before they had taken their respective positions. In silence they waited; suddenly a nervous attitude of attention heralded the expected approach. Down the causeway came a dull clatter of hoofs mingling with the low rumbling of a coach.

“Halt!”

As the order rang out sharply there came as reply a gun-shot from an attendant as he sprang from his station and took his place beside the vehicle. One of the Marquis's followers, severely wounded, fell from his horse. The next moment a woman's voice broke the silence as the attacking party surrounded the carriage.

“Jean, we are beset?” It was half cry, half question.

The Marquis flashed his lantern in the direction of the speaker, and looked into a face defiant in its despair, yet made only the more beautiful because of it. Wherein its beauty lay he could not have told, but that its charm was potent was his only knowledge. The picture sank deep into his heart, there to remain through all his days.

“So you are the leader of this attack upon a woman!” she cried scornfully.

Her words brought him back sharply from the dreams she had awakened. With only one definite thought in mind, he sprang to her side saying in a low voice:

“Mademoiselle mistakes, I came to rescue.”

Maddened by her scorn, thrilling beneath the spell of her personality, he knew but one way to prove his loyalty. Strength came to him as from an unseen power, and he lunged

savagely at his erstwhile friends, while they pressed eagerly forward to gaze upon this much-talked-of champion of the King's cause.

"Stand back!" he warned.

There was no mistaking his motives now, and with loud oaths his followers came at him, hissing and mad with rage at his treachery.

"Ah, but Monsieur is clever!" breathed a low voice in his ear.

The Marquis turned slightly to see the man whom Mademoiselle had addressed as Jean, so valiantly aiding his defense and with such coolness and skill that not only his admiration was aroused, but he was given new hope; yet the struggle was indeed unequal. Two against three, and those three numbered amongst the most famous swordsmen and duelists in Paris. Could they do it? The question repeated itself in the Marquis's mind, so tense was he with excitement. His arm was weary, his eyes scorching with looking, when—ah—but the fellow was a faithful knave!—his friend of the early evening deftly and innocently tripped the stronger adversary and then so tired was he that he staggered, apparently exhausted. As the Marquis without difficulty threw him and bent to press his hand in silent acknowledgement of his aid, the man whispered:

"Bravo, Monsieur the Marquis! I am

proud of thee for this night's rescue. Now get thee gone quickly while I keep busy these villains. I must not seem to aid thee or my life be forfeit. Away, and may good luck attend thee and the lady!"

Sore puzzled yet thrilling strangely at the thought of this brave fellow's friendship, the Marquis turned again to the coach, motioning the attendant to drive on.

"Will Mademoiselle allow me to ride beside her till she is beyond danger of further trouble?" he inquired, gently.

"Monsieur," she said, impulsively, her voice trembling with excitement and emotion; and as her eyes met his it seemed to him that he had found at last that for which he had long been seeking, "forgive my hasty suspicion; surely it was but natural. Ah, but your rescue was noble! I cannot thank you properly. For myself I do not care so much, but I guard the honor of two people—the King's and my cousin's. How *Le Capitaine* discovered it I cannot guess, for these men must surely be his followers. I did not dream of molestation here and now, yet my carelessness has endangered others than myself. I would that I could express all of my gratitude."

The carriage which had been driven rapidly now came to a halt at the border of the province.

“Mademoiselle,” interposed the Marquis with a gesture of repudiation, “I do not like to hear the word ‘gratitude’ upon your lips. Surely you can guess how much it means to me now that I have found you and served you.”

He noted that she started with surprise at his significant words, and he continued more controlledly. “It is sufficient that it has been my privilege to protect a woman if not to save her from annoyance. As for reward, it is enough that I have the memory of one fair deed to brighten an otherwise dark future and an unhappy past. I only hope that the fates may not deny that you may arrive at your destination in safety, and that perhaps some time I shall see you again and be of service.”

Her eyes shone with pleasure at his words and now she guessed something of the reason for his apparently strange remark and subsequent conventionality.

“Goodbye then, Monsieur, and I wish you all good fortune instead of the woeful future you picture for yourself. Remember, gloomy forebodings sometimes herald the coming of the greatest joy. In times of peace, then, Monsieur.”

“You will not forget?” he questioned eagerly, as he bent over her hand, for a moment a great happiness possessing him.

That he had no thought of circumstances or surroundings save the fact of her presence was evident, and, realizing this, she ignored the touch of his hand upon hers, leaving it passive in his palm. For a moment her glance met his frankly, searchingly, then faltered, as a flush mounted quickly to her temples.

"I shall not forget," she answered, and her voice, always musical, thrilled with a new emotion. "Monsieur's face and voice, after such a deed, can not easily be forgotten."

Then overwhelmed at her own impetuosity as well as his, she drew back into the darkness of the coach.

The Marquis with an impulse of pleasure not to be resisted, seized his opportunity. "Ah—it is well, Mademoiselle! Pray tell me where I may find you when the time and circumstances permit. Am I asking too much?"

"Monsieur has proven his rank," she replied with charming coquetry, then she paused for a second, before she continued in a lowered tone of surpassing sweetness. She spoke so softly that he was forced to stoop that he might hear, and a strand of her hair brushed his cheek. As he glanced at her—was he mistaken?—her face had crimsoned from the fact.

"In the Province of LeRoi," she said, "there is a château that stands on a hill. 'Tis the only one of its kind. Over half the Province it looks, and, best of all, a charm none other possesses, it views the blue ranges of Spain."

"Ah!" he faltered, as she laid her hand in his.

"Drive on, Jean," she called to her servant, and as the carriage moved by, the Marquis stood with uncovered head, gazing after a pale, sweet face in a window-pane, and dreaming of that last lingering glance.

"So, Monsieur," spoke a light voice, "that is the solution."

The Marquis wheeled abruptly as his reverie was thus ruthlessly disturbed. He confronted Le Capitaine and his followers, among them his acquaintance of the early evening. He stared at them in silence, wondering vaguely why they did not pursue Mademoiselle. Then as suddenly his thoughts returned to this man who had done him a right good turn, a faithful fellow. He would reward him. How? Ah!—The blue hills of Spain—exile! What was he to dream dreams, to enter a fool's paradise? Exile was his lot. Exile? Nay, these men had come to arrest him for rescuing Mademoiselle. Death was his portion, after all. And the château? He

would never see it. He felt strangely dizzy. Could he be ill? Nay, that could not be. Then he was shot for treason, dying. Ah, yes—the Marquis de Monerrat. The blue hills of Spain.

In a swoon he fell at his companions' feet.

CHAPTER VII

A Question of Honor

When the newly-made Marquis de Monterat regained consciousness, it was to find himself in a small dark room smelling strangely of dampness. By his side sat his comrade of the previous evening.

“Ha!” he cried, sitting up in vigorous protest. “Who are you, my friend? And what does this mean that I am in bed when the sun is full abroad?”

“Monsieur the Marquis is wounded. Nay, nay, Monsieur”—as the other made a movement to arise—“thou must not stir about. Thou art wounded sore.”

“Wounded is it, my fine fellow? *Sacré*, methought I would awake this morning in another world. I remember now the where-withal of this adventure. So Le Capitaine did not hang me on the spot. It were a miracle!” His usual merry mockery had returned with the light of day, and the other looked upon him in wondering admiration.

“Perchance he is but fattening me for

future sacrifice. So? I care not. But you, Monsieur, who may you be? You played me well last night. But for you, Mademoiselle —,” he faltered, and his carefree face darkened in passing horror.

“Monsieur has no fever?” questioned his comrade anxiously, as he leaned over him. “Surely thou must be wandering, my lord, not to know that it is Du Jeuille who is talking with thee! When they captured thee, Monsieur, I tried to aid thee, but in vain, and they brought thee to this hole.”

“From which I shall shortly find myself led forth into another, dug six feet deep, is it not so?” laughed the Marquis.

Du Jeuille nodded.

“Well, well, my friend, do not look so glum about it. We all must die, and death is better than some alternatives, *n'est-ce pas?* But tell me, Mademoiselle is safe?”

“Thanks to thy gallantry, Marquis. And she was not pursued, as perhaps thou hast supposed. Moreover, Marquis, I owe thee an apology on that score. When I spoke so plainly last night about thee—or rather about love, I did not know that thou didst understand its meaning.” He hesitated.

The Marquis smiled happily, and his face shone with a sweetness at variance with his former mockery. “Nor did I, *mon ami*,”

murmured he, then added thoughtfully, "Du Jeuille, *c'est bien*." In a moment he had fallen peacefully asleep, his hand resting on his companion's arm.

"*Dieu!*" muttered Du Jeuille, as he looked with dimmed eye on his sleeping friend, "*mon Dieu!* If I don't like the fellow, and until tonight I never found a lovable trait. The Marquis de Monterrat, card-player, gambler, with his passion for wine and women, to turn gallant in the face of his avowed friendliness for Le Capitaine! How little we know our comrades! 'Tis dangers prove the man. Who'd have thought that the Marquis de Monterrat, figured in a dozen scandals, would have rescued Mademoiselle LeRoi, cousin to his worst enemy, and to a man he has threatened to kill on sight! As for the papers—*ma foi!* but it is a riddle for the gods! And his face! In faith he is a handsome man, not the dissipated noble I had thought to find, and far younger appearing than I had supposed the Marquis to be."

Thus ruminating, he was startled when the door was pushed open with a crash and Le Capitaine entered. Du Jeuille saluted. A moment his master regarded him, then remarked drily:

"So Monsieur the Marquis still sleeps. Has he awakened at all?"

"Once, Monsieur."

"And how appeared he?"

"A little confused in mind it seemed to me."

"So? Do you think he will be fit to travel by tomorrow? I have a journey for him. Monsieur Du Jeuille seems surprised. Well, I have decided to postpone the Marquis's death for awhile. I have a service for him to render. He is just the man. He is brave—too much so at times—and then it is a jest; Le Capitaine can have his jest sometimes, *n'est-ce pas?*" For a moment he strode up and down the room, then continued abruptly with ironical glance at Du Jeuille.

"Today the King gives his decision. Today will see whether France will or will not be in revolution. Shall the Prince or my Lord D'Antaurier wed the Princess Helene? I think neither."

The last word uttered with added incisiveness seemed a climax to the clear-cut method of his whole speech. He watched with pleasure the look of mingled fear and surprise in Du Jeuille's face. "You wish to know why? Firstly, then, Mademoiselle started last night on her return to the château, without accomplishing her mission. The papers are still in her possession and without them D'Antaurier is powerless. The outcome is obvious,—he must concoct some new plan to

gain his end, and we are given respite. Secondly, the Prince—well, he will not marry the Princess at present; as he has disappeared. He has gone into exile. How much he must have loved the Princess! The castle is in uproar, despite the efforts of diplomats to hush up the matter. He and his clever cousin, the King, could not agree. White with rage, he left the King's presence and has not been seen since. How he managed to elude his companions is a mystery, but it remains that he and the jewels given him by the Queen, his godmother, are missing. He has doubtless gone to Spain. And now we must to our work. This respite has saved De Monterrat's life. It is lucky for him, therefore, that the Prince has a mind of his own. With the prospective bride-groom a runaway, it would be the height of folly to ask the King to annul his written consent to the marriage of the Princess to D'Antaurier. We must wait till we learn the whereabouts of the Prince, and meanwhile try to get possession of this document, before forcing the King's hand. But this other affair—pardons to exiles—there is an opportunity for compelling him to an immediate quarrel, and gaining our ends. Now then, Du Jeuille, how soon can the Marquis travel, think you?"

"To a better world, mean you, Capitaine?"

broke in a merry voice as the sleeper's eyes opened and fastened upon his captor's face. "At once, I think."

But although the wounded man spoke mockingly, he was staring wide-eyed at Le Capitaine, and a strange thought had sprung up in his mind as he looked for the first time upon this mysterious leader.

"*Sacré!* So you are awake! Ye gods, but I could tear you limb from limb for the part you played last night! To see you hang would be a pleasure, yet because you have served me well before, I must overlook this treachery provided you are willing to atone. If not, *ma foi!* but you shall pay, Monsieur Le Marquis, and that in short order! Not by death—as yet—but by undertaking a mission which if not successfully accomplished means death to you."

Le Capitaine's easy cynicism had given way to an anger almost apoplectic, but the other hardly heeded his ranting. He was puzzling over the wonder that had come to pass. This man before him was a perfect reproduction, except in being far younger, of him by whose name they called himself—the Marquis de Monterrat—and this fact was leading to marvelous conjectures. The long, thin, sharp face was identical with that of the traitor so despised at the King's court. The air of

defiant bravado, the sarcasm and harshness in his dry tones, both served as reminders unpleasantly vivid, of one who once basked in the King's favor. Only one difference did there seem to be except in so much as youth and age could differ. In place of the expression of unrestrained pleasure-seeking, the expression of a worn *roué*, which characterized the aged Marquis, there was here a strength and power which showed in a certain undefined look of hatred, of baffled suffering, of almost unacknowledged vengeance. There lurked a sadness in the deep-set eyes which belied the anger now threatening them. It was as if some cruel blow of fortune or some sorrow had turned a naturally generous character to one of sullen discontent which showed in bitterness toward all mankind.

Even as he noted these points of resemblance and difference there flashed into the prisoner's mind the remembrance of a recent statement he had heard that the Marquis de Monterrat had never allowed *Le Capitaine* to see his face. Was there, then, a good and sufficient reason for this so-called eccentricity?

But *Le Capitaine* was continuing, and this time his prisoner gave him heed.

"None has a better right to repair this mischief you have caused. Perhaps Monsieur will like the task I shall set him. It takes

him into the Province of LeRoi, well deserving of its name, a very hornet's nest of the King's party—" He smirked sarcastically, then his expression changed to surprise, for the prisoner had given no heed to his slur, and had not even changed countenance at the implied accusation.

"There are many things I must find out there," he continued briskly. "I need a brave man to fathom them. Monsieur de Monterrat has proven his right to that title in this deed of treachery. Another man would have swung for such misplaced daring. There are some documents we need, papers signed by certain men, chiefly the King, promising to aid a few exiles in Spain. With these in our possession to wave in His Royal Highness's face in proof that he protects those whom he has promised his people that he would drop from favor, we can bring him to terms, unless I am very much mistaken. These papers Monsieur the Marquis will bring me. If he fails, because of his disloyalty, a pistol-shot is the penalty. My spies shall see how faithful he be. What does the Marquis say, death tomorrow or will he undertake the mission?"

"Then my grave is not dug!" mocked the Marquis.

"Dug, but not filled, Monsieur," retorted Le Capitaine, grimly.

"There is hope, then. I may be able to prevail upon some other to take my place in occupying it. You are about my size, Capitaine."

Le Capitaine laughed at his jeer. "Well?" he demanded.

"One question. If I refuse to undertake this mission, I die for my deed of last night?"

"Exactly."

"Then I am to turn spy. One more question, Monsieur. Is it upon the Province in general, or upon one household?"

"Your shrewdness does me credit in my choice of messengers. I cannot say absolutely. Someone in the province has undoubtedly taken charge of these papers. It is for you, Monsieur, to discover who this guardian of the King's documents may be, and to obtain possession of them."

Swiftly the Marquis reviewed the events of the past few years of his life, of his faithful service to the King, of his suddenly acquired knowledge of the rashness of his methods, of his growing unhappiness and suspicions, of his desire for better and higher aim in life than animated the King's court, and finally of the last great step in which he had ruthlessly flung aside all restraint and chosen the path which did not lead to realms of court. As he realized the meaning of Le Capitaine's offer

he wavered, but only for a moment. A spy? It was not spying when one had deserted the old life for the new. There was no reason why that new life should not be given over to one service as well as to another. He not only could not turn back now, but he did not desire to. He had elected to play another man's part, and the merry farce should go on. Behind him lay death or dishonor. Before him lay—what? Dishonor? Mayhap, and yet in his heart he felt that he held the key to Le Capitaine's identity, which knowledge, if put to the right use, could accomplish many purposes. As for his threats—might not death be preferable to a life of bitter sacrifice? Moreover—and a light leaped to his eyes—somewhere “in the Province of LeRoi a château” overlooked “the blue hills of Spain!” Its influence upon his life was only beginning to be felt.

“Very well, Capitaine, I start tomorrow,” he agreed grimly.

Le Capitaine eyed him keenly. “Remember, Marquis, death is the penalty for treachery. Once you have escaped because a Prince has given a short reprieve. Again it will not be so. Tomorrow I shall give you written instructions. Adieu, then, for the moment.”

The door had hardly closed, when the

Marquis, utterly wearied, murmured sleepily, "LeRoi—I am glad. Perhaps I—" he dozed.

Du Jeuille beside him, seeing the smile on his lips as he slept, sighed and smiled simultaneously, and his own thoughts flew to a fair lady's side, a lady far over the border in Spain.

CHAPTER VIII

The Journey's End

The following day De Monterrat set out upon his journey, carrying with him written instructions of which he was to break the seal on arriving at LeRoi. The ride was long and tiresome; the Marquis, hardly recovered from his wound, was much wearied as the end of the road was reached. At the foot of the hill which he must climb to enter LeRoi, he brought his tired horse to a stand, and then fell into a gloomy reverie. The long, dreary ride had wrought upon his nerves and upon his hopefulness. All the buoyancy which had upheld him since his interview with Le Capitaine deserted him before the arduous trip. What he had viewed so cheerfully and merrily seemed now the height of folly and treachery. He smiled mockingly at the deception he had practised upon himself in persuading his mind to dwell upon the discovery he had thought he had made. That there could be any truth in it appeared now the madness of delirium, and he derided his own credulity and vanity

which had so misled him. His wound was paining him severely, and altogether he could bring himself to do no more than utter curses upon himself for his foolhardiness. Moreover, his heart had awakened to the whole import of the course he had so recklessly pursued.

In the last town through which he had passed hardly an hour before, he had come face to face with Monsieur Beaumon and Lord DeChatton. They had not recognized him, his hood being drawn over his face, nor, in fact, had they even glanced at him, so hurried were they on their journey—no doubt in the King's service, thought the Marquis bitterly. At sight of them he had almost cried out in joyous recognition, so long did it seem since he had looked upon their kindly faces and felt their hearty grasp of friendship. Were they looking for him, perchance? The thought had unnerved him, and now he longed for those happy, carefree days which had been his in the past; a past which seemed centuries ago, and as unreal as those centuries would necessarily be. Questions arose in his mind as to this task which he had undertaken. The dangers which threatened him on all sides need not be faced, for it might not yet be too late to depart from France, and now it did not seem the part of wisdom to remain. As he recalled the expression on Le Capitaine's

face when he had handed him the packet, he wondered what secret instructions it bore. He had not liked his manner even then, when he had been in the throes of that mad confidence in his powers of discernment and accomplishment, so that he had deliberately defied the warning his better sense had tried to give him. He marvelled now at the madness which had possessed him that he had ignored his suspicions, and had obeyed Le Capitaine's commands as to opening the packet. He realized for the first time how fully he had been a puppet in a villain's power, and how carelessly he had fallen into the trap, as though he had been a child of three. The thought that Le Capitaine was now no doubt laughing at his prisoner's innocence only increased his anger and self reproach. In a rage of impotent fury he tore the cover from his instructions, and in a moment his eyes lighted with excitement, as he read:

“You asked me if there is one household on which you should spy. I evaded the question, but in all the province there is one the most likely to hold the secret we desire. There you must find shelter. You must gain entrance by some ruse. Take any name and plan you choose, but be sure you succeed. My men whom I send to report upon you will transmit news of you to me.

“This house to which I refer is a beautiful château owned by the family for whom the province is named—LeRoi. The Duc of LeRoi is at present in Spain—in service of the King. For one of Monsieur Le Marquis’s charms, it will be no hard task to win the favor and confidence of the mistress of the château—his niece—if he has not already done so. That, Monsieur, is one reason why I entrusted to you this work. It has long been known that Monsieur the Marquis likes nothing better than to win a woman’s trust, then scorn it.

“Now, Marquis, is your opportunity to exercise those arts for which you are famed, and to win the thanks and praise of Le Capitaine, and of all his followers. Do your best. If Monsieur thinks to evade my watch, he much mistakes, and if any feeling of gallantry again bids him betray me, or to escape this task by leaving for Spain, I can tell him now it is useless. My men have orders to bring the Marquis back, alive, if possible, a corpse, if necessary. The grave is dug! Now, methinks, De Monterrat knows with what manner of man he is dealing. Wishing all and speedy success, Le Capitaine.”

The Marquis bowed his head in despair. It was too late. Even Spain was denied him, and he must spy upon a woman. Spy? Nay,

he served the King no longer. And then his heart leaped within him. At least he would be near Mademoiselle, and could, perchance, be of service to her. Mademoiselle! How quaint it seemed to speak thus of the woman he had found so mysteriously and unexpectedly! He had little dreamed that when he found *her* it would be in this manner, and even in ignorance of her name. A passing thought of Marguerite came to him, and he smiled tenderly. Her influence upon his life had been for wondrous good—but that was all. He would like to see her again. He hoped that some time he would, and then he wondered if she gave him a thought in his wanderings, or pondered as to his present whereabouts.

The memory of her, strangely enough, brought to his mind his conjectures concerning the identity of Le Capitaine, and on the instant he resolved to cling to his poor, faulty theory and to follow it to some end, however disappointing. That at least would give him a motive for remaining in France, since he was to be in all other matters a slave of Le Capitaine's, as well as satisfy himself that he had left no path unexplored. And—Mademoiselle—!

He raised his head defiantly, and spoke to his horse to continue on his way. Le Capitaine had paid him a pretty compliment, truly,

when he suggested the method by which he should gain Mademoiselle LeRoi's confidence! It explained the reputation of the real Marquis de Monterrat. He had not expected to have the rôle of *beau gallant* thrust upon him when he had robbed the other of his name and title. What he had guessed from Du Jeuille's insinuations concerning De Monterrat was more than confirmed by Le Capitaine. His contempt for the Marquis, always great, increased.

"So, Monsieur the Marquis," he muttered, "this is your method of life. Perchance in the course of the next few months we can infuse a little, a very little, decency into your character. In faith, it will be worth the risk if I can persuade your acquaintances to think that you have reformed, and that you possess a few attributes of the gentleman. And the first stroke to that end will be—? *Ma foi!* It is a puzzle when one finds so many slimy pools to swim."

At this moment a carriage swept by, and the Marquis, hastily uncovering his head, stood aside for it to pass. He caught a glimpse of a woman's face in the window, and his hand trembled and clutched closer the bridle as he leaned eagerly forward over his horse's neck. He watched the coach disappear in a cloud of dust. Still with hat in hand, he sat

staring stupidly into space, asking himself if his dreams of Mademoiselle had turned his reason.

Slowly he continued on his way, his mind filled with various conflicting thoughts; his heart now in despair, now hoping, yet ever in tumult. As he entered the village, the lights flashed, for the sun had been set some time, and it was too late to do more than find lodging for the night.

Thankful for the enforced delay, he made his way to the village inn, where his uniform and his face, but still more, the sight of a gold piece, gained him immediate and most reverent attention. Utterly wearied, yet dreading the night, he finished a light repast and retired to his room. Here a thousand fears assailed him in his sleep, in which Le Capitaine's threats and quarrels with his spies mingled with the memory of his rescue of the woman he loved.

On the morrow he awakened still troubled in mind, but the bright sunshine brought something of courage to his heart, and it was with cheerful smile and care-free air that he questioned his host, as he ate a more hearty meal than on the previous evening.

Equipped with the knowledge his landlord had been very willing to impart, he set out on horseback on a tour of the country.

The Province of LeRoi is one of the most

beautiful in France, and on this morning it seemed to have donned its rarest charms. As the Marquis rode along, the sweet fresh air, the fragrance of flowers, the sparkle and murmur of brooks, the clouds in the blue summer sky, seemed all combined to make him forget his fears and forebodings, to impress upon him the joy of living, and to make Mademoiselle appear more tangible, and not a dream that exile in Spain could destroy. Hardly noting the direction in which he was traveling, yet with an unadmitted purpose vaguely guiding him, he climbed the high hill, half-way up which the little village was located. At the top he paused with an exclamation of delight and admiration as a view of the whole country was spread before him. In the distance he could distinguish a mere cluster of roofs which he knew to be Toulouse; below lay the valley through which he had yesterday traveled, and—ah! behind him—he wheeled—the blue hills of Spain!

For a moment he sat speechless with surprise, his thoughts in tumult, then with bounding pulse he realized the full meaning of his whereabouts. He urged his horse forward with his spurs. Eagerly, yet also with a strange dread, he rode onward, peering to right and left, and all the while his heart was singing to the glad refrain: "The château!"

Suddenly the clatter of horse's hoofs reached his ear. As the sound drew nearer, he reined in his steed, and, as on the previous day, drew aside for a carriage to pass. On it came; it was beside him, and he saw within a face that he knew full well. The coach swept past, and before he could recover from his emotion it stopped, and a man whom he recognized came running toward him. It was Jean, and he brought a message to "Monsieur." "Mademoiselle was in the carriage waiting to speak to him if he cared to return." If he cared! The next moment he held her hand, and once more looked into eyes he had seen in dreams and delirium for a month it seemed to him.

"I saw Monsieur yesterday, but waited to be sure. The darkness sometimes plays one tricks." She smiled as she alluded to their former meeting. "But Jean was positive and so today I dared to be so bold—" she faltered.

"I was looking for the château, Mademoiselle. I arrived but last evening, too late to attempt any quest." He seemed to excuse his tardiness.

"Ah, then, doubtless Monsieur would like to continue on his way, and I am detaining him."

"Mademoiselle is cruel," responded the Marquis gravely. "It is not the château, but what it contains, I seek."

"Ah! So much the better. Its owner away, Monsieur would have opportunity for an undisturbed examination."

The Marquis bit his lip, his usual mockery deserting him.

"Perhaps," he retorted at last, angry with himself for his unwonted confusion, "he prefers to enter in company with its owner."

Mademoiselle laughed merrily. "Well spoken, Monsieur—?"

Her implied query caused him to fill in quickly, "Le Marquis de Beauchanson."

"Yes? And the Marquis is here on a mission—in the good cause—*n'est-ce pas?*"

"In the good cause!" The words called up memories he did not desire just then.

"Yes, on a mission, Mademoiselle, and one of *grande importance*."

"Monsieur has friends here? Surely he would not venture into a strange country, and one beset by dangers."

"Dangers, Mademoiselle?" he returned lightly. "Methinks you are jesting with me, for all men dwell amidst dangers in these vexatious days—unless they be craven."

"Monsieur," she interrupted hastily, "you have misunderstood me. I pray you pardon me for the awkward manner of my speech. None could question Monsieur's courage. Our first meeting was adequate proof of its

existence. I was thinking of the perils which must of necessity surround one where one has no friends. You are acquainted in the Province?"

The Marquis colored with pleasure at her praise. "I have no acquaintances here, Mademoiselle," he answered, simply.

"Ah, then, Monsieur de Beauchanson, here is opportunity for me to pay my debt in part, and to show my gratitude. My home is at your service. It would not do that a friend of mine should look to an inn for shelter when my hospitality can establish him in ease, and perhaps help him on his errand, for, Monsieur, here in the Province there are many suspicious of strangers, but if you were in the château, none could question your comings and goings. Allow me, Monsieur, this privilege?"

She spoke rapidly and convincingly, and the Marquis's heart leaped at her words. By accepting her hospitality, he could ignore Le Capitaine's request that he seek shelter at the château de LeRoi. The thought brought with it the more unwelcome one of the reason for his presence in the Province, and he shrank before the memory. There was nothing for him to do but to refuse. At least he would act honorably so far as she was concerned, however much this chance meant to him in preserving another point of honor. Certainly

he owed her more chivalrous treatment than he owed this other strange woman, the Mademoiselle LeRoi.

"Mademoiselle," he responded hurriedly, "your kind heart forgets all caution. You know me not. Such faith is rash. It is only right to say to you that I do not deserve such friendliness at your hands."

Something in his tone brought a fulness to the girl's heart. It was as if he were trying to tell her of a sorrow in his life, and the deep, low voice was vibrating with an emotion which his conventional words did not conceal. To her, indeed, his sentence had attained a meaning which robbed it of all formal sound. "There are reasons, Mademoiselle," he added, "why I cannot so impose upon your trustfulness."

The title as he spoke it thrilled with the power which it held for him, ignorant of her name, and by the touch of magic which had characterized all their acquaintance she caught the subtle note, and her eyes met and held his with a sweet candor which wrought a spell about them both.

"Besides," he continued in a voice which fell with a pleasing cadence, "if I should come under the pall of your neighbors' suspicions it would reflect upon you, and perchance prove of annoyance in many ways, whereas

my desire is only to serve you. I pray you not to misunderstand me. Do not think I fail to appreciate, for, Mademoiselle, this proof of your faith in me will help me to hold to higher aims, and to keep my mind unsullied, even as the thought of finding you some day has served to inspire me with loftier ideals."

His unworthiness rose to mock him in the knowledge of her implicit confidence, and he spoke far more eloquently than he realized in voicing his humility. Her truthful eyes seemed to read his very soul, and in her gaze he saw revealed the character which would scorn him as he really was. Her presence which had grown dear to him in so mysterious and sudden a manner was now the punishment for his rashness, and his one wish was to leave her, though to do so was added misery.

He bent over her hand, pressed it reverently to his lips, then looked up quickly into her eyes, as if to impress some final picture upon his mind as he said brokenly: "We may not meet again, Mademoiselle, under happy circumstances. I pray you think as kindly of me in the future as you may. Farewell, Mademoiselle."

He turned away, but she held him quietly as her clasp on his hand tightened.

"Monsieur!" The light of tears in her eyes did not escape him, "You have

proven yourself by those words the gentleman I thought you. My belief in you has only been confirmed. I beg of you to grant my wish to prove my trust in you, and to thank you for all you have done for me. Monsieur, of course, cannot fail to respond to such a plea." She smiled in merry raillery, then added more seriously, "My confidence is not misplaced, or I am no judge of men. The man is shown by deeds as well as words, and both have shown Monsieur to me. As for what you fear—the suspicion of my neighbors—," she chuckled amusedly, "that would indeed be strange. The actions of the house of LeRoi are never questioned. Ours is the house of rule in the province of our name."

"LeRoi!" The name was only a murmuring, and in the instant all things swam before his sight. Her laughing face seemed far away. His wound suddenly burst into unbearable pain. The weakness and weariness induced by his long journey closed down upon him. His heart grew numb within him at this disclosure. It was as if he had reached the limit of endurance. He leaned heavily against the coach door, his hand limp upon his horse's bridle.

"Mademoiselle!" The cry escaped him in the despair of losing his dream, and his pallor frightened her.

"Monsieur!" she cried in alarm. "You are ill!"

"No, only weary, and my wound is grievous, I fear." His voice seemed to be slipping from him.

"Your wound? Ah! You suffer—in my defense?"

Her pity aroused him to a last effort. "It is nothing. I—I—permit me to leave you. I—am—unworthy—" he faltered. His senses swam, he reeled, and yet her clear, sweet gaze pierced the veil fast enclouding his mind.

His mental agony escaped her. Physical suffering she believed it.

"Jean!" Her appeal for aid to her serving-man was the last sound to penetrate the mist enveloping him. An instant's struggle and he lost all knowledge.

CHAPTER IX

The Mystery of Le Capitaine

“Monsieur, the Marquis is better?”

At the low-spoken question the Marquis de Beauchanson opened his eyes languidly. For some moments he glanced bewilderedly around the handsomely furnished room, now all agleam in the morning sunlight. Then memories returned in a flood of bitterness and pleasure, as he looked upon Jean seated beside him and watching him anxiously.

“This is the château of LeRoi, *n'est-ce pas?*” he asked simply.

“Yes, Monsieur. We brought you here yesterday after you fainted on the highway. Your wound had hardly healed enough for your journey from Paris, my lord. It was careless to undertake it, Monsieur. You overdid and perhaps the excitement, too, was the finishing touch. The wound re-opened, Monsieur fainted, and we brought him home. Mademoiselle was much concerned that you did not tell her of your wound, Monsieur, received in her defense. You see, my lord, that it was fated that you should lodge with us.”

“Ah, yes, it would seem so.” The Marquis mused as he pondered upon the events of the

past few days, and wondered what those to come might have in store. Fate was indeed working strangely. It would appear that from the first it had been out of his hands.

In the four days which followed, the Marquis steadily regained his strength, much to his own disgust and displeasure. They were busy happy days in which he surrendered to Mademoiselle LeRoi's ministrations with a resignation which boded ill for his mission in LeRoi. Grimly he determined to enjoy the present, and refused to recall his purpose in coming to the Province, even while he knew that he would pay doublefold for his present relaxation of conscience in a suffering greater than any he had yet endured.

All his hatred for the injustice and tyranny of the King welled in his heart in these days. He forgot the loyalty and love which once had been his for his sovereign. Perhaps the fact that he was learning the meaning of love was teaching him so forcibly the existence of hate. If the hours were given up to the happiness of the moment, it was with the undefined fear in his mind that these would be the only pleasant memories allowed him in a threatening future. One vague promise filled his mind as he allowed Mademoiselle LeRoi and her aunt to attend his wants and comfort. He had mentally registered a vow that as

soon as he was able to change his quarters he would leave the château, and take lodgings again at the inn. One thing he was resolved upon, regardless of the errand upon which he had come, and despite Le Capitaine's orders: he would not remain beneath her roof another day to spy upon her as her guest. If he must go on with his task, as he could not but choose to do, knowing well that death awaited him should he play Le Capitaine false, unless he returned to Paris and sought service with the King, at least he would do it as manfully as possible. Much as he despised certain phases of his undertaking, he hated even more the thralldom of life at court, to which he could, however, return with conditions distasteful to his pride. Moreover, the thought of showing the King that in some respects he could prove of serious hindrance to him, aroused within him an eagerness for success in the task set him by Le Capitaine.

These days held much of happiness for him, cherished the more, perhaps, because he knew its brevity. Mademoiselle was not only kind; she seemed content in his presence, and his speeches dangerously full of the love welling in his heart did not occasion rebuke from her. She had looked deep into the large, mournful eyes and had read something of the soul mirrored behind the sadness. She guessed,

too, a little of the emptiness of his past, and of the futility of his longings until the present had brought gifts which partially atoned. Doubtless, also, she knew what part she played in the brightening of his life. Apparently she did not find uneasiness in that knowledge, but, on the contrary, awaited contentedly the fulfillment of her own new-found joy.

"Monsieur has been at court?" she asked him once in quiet conversation.

"Most of my life, Mademoiselle," he responded gravely.

"Then you must know my Lord D'Antaurier?" she questioned, eagerly, he thought.

The Marquis smiled bitterly. This nobleman seemed determined that his fate should be interwoven with his own. "Quite well, my lady."

His studied politeness caused Mademoiselle LeRoi to smile brilliantly. "Then you can discourse with me upon his virtues, for I admire him greatly. He is not as are many nobles, given over to idle pleasures and fopperies, but has a deeper character and a higher aim in life."

The Marquis eyed her keenly. Her championship was causing a strange pang in his heart, and at last, realizing his jealousy, he laughed half mockingly, but his eyes remained dark and sad.

"His aim is indeed high now, Mademoiselle LeRoi, even for the hand of a Princess."

She started at the coldness of his tone.

"You do not approve of this alliance?" she asked with oddly trembling voice as she arose in evident excitement.

"There is little room for romance and love at court," was his embittered answer.


"And that, Monsieur, is why I hope these two may wed. They love each other; I believe," she broke off with a laugh; "or at least so my cousin tells me, and I hope that he is right."

"Your cousin?" he asked abruptly. "May I ask who your cousin may be?"

Her brow wrinkled in her surprise, then she laughed a low, bubbling, amused laugh, as if she suddenly understood something. "Lord D'Antaurier is my cousin, Monsieur."

"Lord D'Antaurier—your cousin? Ah, yes! I had forgotten." He was gazing at her as one fascinated. "You spoke highly of him, Mademoiselle LeRoi; so highly in fact, that I was trying to devise some excuse for calling him out in a duel." He smiled ruefully as he feasted upon her beauty.

"A pretty speech of the court, Monsieur?" she derided, gently.

 "Nay, not so, Mademoiselle!" he whispered tenderly, and for an instant placed his hand

upon her own, then remembering that he had now no right to speak to her of what was in his heart, he forced himself to his old-time mockery as he said lightly, "now that Mademoiselle tells me of her relationship to my Lord D'Antaurier, I can trace many points of likeness, for he is one famed at court for his admirable presence and self-composure, as well as for other charms of personality. In fact I marvel that I did not guess before that he is your cousin, for you have the same brilliantly dark hair, Mademoiselle, and the same glorious brown eyes that are the envy and despair of noble women as well as of noblemen at the King's court."

"It is the well-known pleasantry of court which my lord utters now," retorted Mademoiselle LeRoi, reprovingly, "and one which I am sorry to see in Monsieur, here in our distant province of LeRoi, for it bespeaks the idle pastime which should not be carried so far from the assemblies of the throne-room."

His face became grave before her jesting tone, and as he looked upon her, she read therein the expression as of a wound sharply and unexpectedly inflicted by one whose power to hurt was great.

"An idle pastime," he repeated slowly and softly. Gone was the lightness and frivolity which had once characterized his speech.

"Mayhap, Mademoiselle, this idle speech but covers a meaning far more serious than it were wise to frame in words, and so I pray that you think not ill of an effort hardly made to hide a deeper note."

He smiled upon her as he crossed the room, but when he had left her, she sat for a long time pondering his reply, and thinking of the sadness in his face, as he had spoken with a restraint which left so much to be guessed.

"What is it, Marie?" Her aunt's voice aroused her from her study.

"We must try to bring Monsieur the Marquis out into the sunshine, Aunt," she replied half sadly and meditatively. "He bears a burden which is crushing him in sorrow, and perhaps—in remorse—yet I believe that he has done no wrong. It is fate, mayhap, which has led him in hard paths."

Thus four days sped by of a bitterly sweet heaven, and he could put aside no longer the inevitable. He must go from her home at once. And yet before he took this step he determined to make an effort along another line of action for which he would require Jean's aid.

As his wound had healed enough so that he could leave his room, to dine with his hostesses in the grand old dining hall of the château, he also had become interested once more in the

events of his adventure. Continually he sought Jean's society, questioning him concerning the surrounding country and those who dwelt therein. Thus he had an easy way to Jean's good graces, and gained from him important information. Jean, with the usual admiration of the serving-class for those higher in rank who possess virtues of dignity and bravery, looked with eyes of faithful worship upon this nobleman who had rescued his mistress so gallantly against overwhelming odds. And the Marquis, on his part, found Jean a man whose courage placed him upon a higher plane than that occupied by the usual serving-man—even as Lord D'Antaurier had recognized this—and he also admitted him to a certain comradeship and friendliness.

On the fourth day, accordingly, he persuaded Jean that he was strong enough to sit astride his horse, and together they rode out into the Province. He had expressed a desire to see the famous old château formerly owned and occupied by the elder Marquis de Monterrat, before it had been confiscated by the crown on the discovery of the younger Marquis's treachery—a history well known in Paris. Thereafter the Marquis had retired to a small estate in Blois where he was permitted to live in peace, and in such content as his cruel and revengeful nature allowed. The château, fal-

len into decay and ruin, so Jean declared, lay not far away from the home of Mademoiselle LeRoi, and thither they wended their way.

As they rode along, the Marquis beguiled the journey with tales of Paris and of the court, yet ever avoided all mention of those he felt Jean might know too well. In this manner it was not hard to bring the subject to bear upon Le Capitaine, and then leave the conversation to Jean. His hopes were not unrewarded, for Jean, placing implicit confidence in the Marquis, told him many circumstances worthy of consideration in Le Capitaine's life, learned, doubtless, during his many errands on Mademoiselle Le Roi's or on Lord D'Antaurier's behalf.

"And his identity, Jean? Is there then no suspicion among his followers as to his real name and home?" he asked casually.

Jean smiled in grim significance, and, seeing it, the Marquis awaited his reply with hardly concealed eagerness.

"Monsieur the Marquis has heard of the Lady Anne de Moirée, once the most beautiful woman at the court of Paris and of Toulouse?"

"Lady Anne de Moirée!" mused the Marquis, his eye lighting. "Ah, yes, I remember her name, and also the story which clings to her early life."

Jean cast a keen glance upon him. "She

was a lady of many charms—and of many loves, Monsieur de Beauchanson, is it not said? It is also told that she is the mother of Le Capitaine. His father? In faith—Who knows?”

The Marquis wheeled abruptly in his tracks, and his face gleamed in great enlightenment.

“His mother, the Lady Anne de Moirée!” he cried in incredulity, and also in triumph. “Ah! I begin to see the light at last! She dwelt in Toulouse, *n'est-ce pas?* And that is when—ah, well, you know the tale!”

“Yes, Monsieur, that was when she was at the height of her power, loved and courted by many high in France, and of them all King Louis XI held greatest favor. She in her turn ruled all the court by first ruling his wayward heart.”

The Marquis nodded. “She was his favorite, and if her portraits speak truly, I do not wonder. She had marvelous beauty.” He mused awhile, then added softly, “Mayhap we cannot judge the King too harshly—nor her, for he, too, was well-favored, and he was the King. But wait, methinks she left Toulouse, and followed the King's army for a space. In fact it was while the King warred upon the Dukes of Brittany and Bourbon, and even against Burgundy, his former befrienders. The Lady Anne chose for some

reason to follow the fortunes of war, and—,” he broke off shortly in his reverie, and his eyes opened in wide amazement. “Ye gods!” he exclaimed in wild exultation. “I have it now! The Marquis commanded the army at that time! The rest is plain!”

“The Marquis?” questioned Jean in wonder. “Whom speak you of, my lord?”

“Of one who might well be Le Capitaine’s father,” returned the Marquis quietly. “The likeness—” he paused.

A moment Jean stared at him, and seemed to ponder; then he, too, cried out in excitement, and his face was filled with amazement.

“*Sacré*, you’re right!” he shouted. “The Marquis de Monterrat!”

“Soft, Jean, nothing of this to a living soul! We must have our proof.”

“Proof, say you, Monsieur? Then it is ours. I know well the peasants at the Marquis’s château, and if there is a document in existence it will be ours within the week.”

“Your hand upon it, Jean, and your pledge of secrecy!”

The handclasp which followed boded well for the future.

CHAPTER X

An Enchanted Garden

Filled with hope, and busy with plans to execute his purpose, the Marquis returned to the château. His cheeriness and merriment at dinner surprised Mademoiselle who had seen little but his graver, more despondent nature thus far in their acquaintance. For the first time she beheld him in the happy light which had always been his before sorrows and troubles had crowded upon him. Her answering gaiety warmed his mood like wine. His eyes shone in kindly humor and mischief. His mocking smile curved his lips. His laugh rang out happy and refreshing, causing hers to echo his in glad abandonment to mirth. He jested and talked and grew mellow with pleasure in entertaining her, and gloried in the gracious response she vouchsafed him. She met his jests in corresponding wit, and all the while the love which had sprung into being through sadness glowed and strengthened through joy.

In the evening they strolled on the broad

balcony, and gradually their words changed to quieter tone and sweeter. The autumn night with its enticing perfumes of speeding summer closed them around with delicate beauty, and the faint gleam of the full moon fell upon their shaded path. The peaceful touch of Nature soothed and caressed, completing the understanding which their merriment had begun. Below the balcony where they walked was the garden bathed in the soft moonlight, and even now showing, though vaguely, and with even more charm for the very elusiveness, the many colors of Mademoiselle's cherished flowers. Over their heads glistened the white walls of the château's quaint turrets and towers.

He had grown silent beneath the witchery of her presence, and of the night, and, she, feeling the change, waited in calm contentment for what it presaged. She would not have been the wonderful woman she was had she failed to recognize the reverent homage in his handsome eyes as he viewed her dainty loveliness.

Tonight, as on all evenings since he had been their guest, both Madame and Mademoiselle had dressed with the same punctilious care they would have shown had they been planning to appear at court assembly as was their right by rank. The Marquis, also, had followed their example, and so had donned on this

evening, in his mood of happiness, a certain suit of white satin that became him well and had on so many former occasions at court been the envy and pride of his fellow-nobles.

Mademoiselle LeRoi had also chosen to wear white—a gown of ivory tinted velvet, somewhat closely fitted save for the widely flowing sleeves which fell apart only to reveal the shining satin white of a perfect arm and wrist. Around her gleaming throat was clasped a string of pearls, and at her corsage there swayed and drooped a cluster of pink roses. Her brilliant black hair and glorious dark eyes shone with rare new charm in the magic moonlight, and it was not strange that the Marquis could not lift his gaze from the glorious woman beside him, so strongly did she weave upon him the spell of her elusive feminine power.

“It is the time for song, *n'est-ce pas?*”

The question, simple in itself, yet rang with wondrous meaning. The woman knew full well that he had dwelt at court, and was versed in all its subtle methods of pretending love for pastime. Yet she did not doubt him in this instance. His words had been too few and simple. At moments of idle pleasure they came quickly and in flowery eloquence far different from this.

“You sing, Monsieur?” she observed, quietly.

"I was thinking then of a noblewoman of court, and of the pleasure she has given me at my request. She has a wondrous voice, and reaches a deeper note than the casual singer. She sang for me the night before I saw you first, Mademoiselle, and the song she sang might well be of this garden-path before us, and of the mood it wakens."

"You miss her, Monsieur?"

Had her voice faltered in the question? His heart bounded with hope.

"She is the favored lady-in-waiting to the Princess Helene," he answered gently. "Had you dwelt at court, Mademoiselle, you would know how rare it is to find true friends among the many courtiers. I think that she alone has understood me for my actual self. She has dared to show me friendship, and I honor her. Once she told me the secret of her heart, since she had fathomed mine. Her love is given to a man she has not seen in many years, and perhaps may never see again."

Her voice rang out joyously as she replied to him, for she read the reason of his explanation.

"Has Monsieur de Beauchanson ever played upon a guitar? I have one here recently brought from Spain." She went quickly to a table on the veranda, and lifted the instrument in her hands.

“Ah!” As he took it from her, his hand closed over hers, and she did not immediately withdraw it.

As they seated themselves, she did not lose the tender gladness which brightened his eyes. In silence she waited, and in the interval she was swept along resistlessly upon the tide of romance which the night had brought to them. The world and all its joys were hers. She had entered into an enchanted kingdom of hope and promise, and satisfied desires, and, as its queen, she felt its magic power enthralling her prince who had come, and was now beside her.

“When night falls in dreamy silence
On the garden sweet with flowers,
And I seek in sad compliance
To vain longings, scented bowers,
Then deep in my heart's recesses,
Thoughts wake pleading to be heard,
Nature soothes with soft caresses
And my soul's with wonder stirred.

“In the shadows and the gloaming,
Music falling clear and light,
Then I dream my soul's deep dreaming,
Follow fancy's playful sprite.
Longings fill me 'neath the magic
Longings which I recognize,



“‘It is my heart, Mademoiselle. I have sung it to you’”

And though wakening spells the tragic,
I bid love to tyrannize."

His voice faltered at the end. He turned to her, and saw in her eyes that which brought the blood surging to his cheeks. The past was forgotten, the future a myth, only his overwhelming love for her was real to him in that moment. In an instant he was kneeling before her, holding her hand in his.

"It is my heart, Mademoiselle, I have sung it to you, but not all, for that I cannot do, so full is it of you."

She looked into his face with a tenderness which he had not dreamed could ever exist in face of woman for him, and, seeing it, his heart smote him. Remembrance of his errand swept over him in a torrent of despair and shame. She placed her hand gently on his head. This completed his undoing.

"Mademoiselle!" he burst forth in an agony of remorse and misery, "I am unworthy! I have no right!"

He buried his face in his hands, struggling to regain his self-control in the storm of repentance and self-loathing which was engulfing him. Then at last the quivering caress of her fingers on his bowed head quieted his nerves, and brought wondrous balm to his heart.

"Monsieur is weary," Mademoiselle LeRoi spoke tenderly. "He has traveled far today, and is overwrought. Your wound, Monsieur, is hardly healed, and you must not ride forth again for awhile. I have been careless to allow it. I see that I shall have to exercise authority and consider Monsieur's welfare, since he is so reckless."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, I submit me to thy gentle hands. Do with me as thou wilt, and make of me what thou canst. I am not worthy now to speak my love. The future mayhap can atone, and show me the path to happiness. Forgive my presumption."

"There is nothing to forgive, Monsieur," she answered, happy in his less formal term of address. "Monsieur has proven himself a gentleman, and such words from him can surely cause no displeasure. My lord has paid me the highest honor woman can receive from one who has shown himself a noble in deeds as well as rank. Monsieur speaks to me ever as 'Mademoiselle.' It is seldom Mademoiselle LeRoi and never 'Marie.' Has he then a reason for this?" she questioned, half merrily.

The Marquis smiled in spite of his conflicting emotions. "Mademoiselle will accuse me of being sentimental when I explain. For me thou wilt always be 'Mademoiselle'

since for many days thou wert known to me by no other name, and from the moment I looked into thine eyes on the causeway, I knew that thou wert the one woman above all others in the world. It is therefore a tender whim of mine to ignore thy name—until—perhaps sometime—I may be worthy to ask to call thee by thy given name—Marie.” His voice sank to a whisper and the caress of the word fell reverently upon her ear.

On the following morning he realized that he must go from her house at once. He cursed himself for his folly of that glorious night, cursed himself, because he knew that he had touched her heart when he had only one of dishonor to offer her. Was he not here to spy upon her? Was there any hope that he could save her from himself, with death threatening him for treachery? Yet he had dared to tell her of his love.

The happy moments of freedom were over, and clouds, dark and destructive, were gathering once more upon his life, as they had ever gathered when a ray of sunshine chanced to fall upon it. It was in gloom and despair that he paused on the threshold of his apartment and looked around it with something of farewell in his face, then, with a gesture of resignation, he turned and left the house to saddle his horse. He had come to the parting

of the ways. Despite Mademoiselle's attempts to dissuade, he mounted his horse, and wended his way to the inn, one purpose in mind.

As he entered the room, his eye fell upon several officers at play and wine. A shudder passed over him, and, when one arose and addressed him, his fears increased. There was nothing to do but to accept the invitation, and to join them in a glass and game. He was eyeing his cards with little zeal, when a sudden pressure of his hand startled him, and looking, he saw a paper thrust into his sleeve while the fellow beside him whispered:

"Le Capitaine! Well done, comrade."

Concealing his excitement as best he could, he finished the round, then bade his new friends courteous adieux and departed. Feverish with eagerness, yet dreading to read this message from his mentor, he rode to the outskirts of the town before breaking the seal.

"Monsieur the Marquis," he read, "has justified my faith in him. I knew that none could rise to the occasion as admirably as this universal favorite with the gentler sex. The ruse, my friend, was clever. Even I should not have thought of playing upon your wound. A skillful twist of a knife, no doubt, did the trick by re-opening it, *mon ami*? You should be an actor. My men tell me the faint was

parfait, and that none could distinguish it from the genuine. I suppose Monsieur has not yet had opportunity to discover the secret, being disabled for the past four days, but now he can surely get to his task and, in the house as he is, it should certainly not be very difficult, especially if he has the lady's regard. I have thought of the contingency, that Monsieur the Marquis may possibly, in his so recently acquired gallantry, desire to leave the château for awhile—merely to hoodwink the lady to be sure—but a word of advice, Marquis, such advice as Le Capitaine in authority can bestow, the work must be accomplished at once. We cannot afford to waste time in silly courtesies. Monsieur will therefore remain in the château, even though it hurt his noble purpose of mind. If he disregards this command, Le Capitaine shall claim the forfeit mentioned at the beginning of our contract. Monsieur understands?"

There was much more in the same ironical strain, but the Marquis savagely crushed the paper in his hand as he muttered an oath.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he murmured, and his head fell upon his horse's neck. Foiled on every hand, even exile in Spain seemed a thing to be desired now that it was denied him. Perversity of mankind! Once he sought death rather than exile, but now a little malicious god had

so blinded him that he had but one wish—to live, although that life offered little if any hope for the consummation of his desires.

So this was the meaning of Le Capitaine's renewed confidence after one betrayal. He appealed to his vanity, knowing that to be his weakest point. De Monterrat, then, was a man who rejoiced in winning regard, only to play upon it. And the insinuation of the reopened wound! Perhaps it were as well Le Capitaine should continue to think the event premeditated. It would help his cause and conceal his conflicting emotions. Ah, what a fool, what a rash fool he had been to go blindfolded into the trap of these traitors! Just at the time when life might have held the best of gifts for him, a happiness for which he had waited since, as a silent, sensitive boy he had lost the only friend who could realize his nature and understand his longings, he must allow that recklessness, the curse of his race, to place him in a position that must forever destroy all hope for a bright future. Back then to the château, the slave of this master who ruled his very soul, back to his task with character sullied beyond all hope of repair.

His mood that evening, so different from his mirth of the preceding one, did not go unnoticed; and Mademoiselle, with the pity of

purity and love, sought to drive the shadow from his face and to give fresh courage to his heart, yet her every act and kindly word stabbed him with renewed agony.

“Monsieur,” she said at last in a soothing voice, as to a tired child, “this is no mood in which to undertake a mission for one’s King and country. It is not in keeping with Monsieur’s character to give way to gloomy forebodings.”

“My lady, it is not that which appalls me. Death has no terrors for me if it be in a worthy cause—ah!—” his face paled —“ ‘worthy’!”

As he paused, Mademoiselle LeRoi, misreading his meaning, continued hurriedly, “But, Monsieur de Beauchanson, remember the glory of duty, the pleasure of serving France. Forget all else in the pride of being her son. If this task which the King has given you must be accomplished by methods verging perhaps on deceit, think what it means to you to be able to overcome these obstacles. It may be that the King, knowing this, entrusted the duty to a man whom he believed could accomplish it with clean hands; and when you go to him, Monsieur,—look forward—it will be in success, with the right to say that you have fulfilled his trust happily, and with the approval of your conscience.”

“Ah!” He watched her face eagerly. “Mademoiselle, there comes a time in every man’s life when he sees himself not as he tries to be or as he wants to be, but as he is. For a moment he is allowed to behold his own soul, and heaven help him if he sees there a picture of faithlessness, of manhood deliberately sullied. Lady LeRoi can know nothing of these things, but it is women such as you, Mademoiselle, that sometimes act as the mirror for the man to use upon himself. Such kindness and trust as yours may have a bitterness as well as a sweetness.”

His face was worn and haggard, and Mademoiselle thought him suffering from his wound.

“Monsieur has paid me the greatest compliment a woman can receive,” she said, softly. “If Monsieur is thinking of some past mistakes, some errors he wishes undone, his repentance is even now atoning for those faults and showing the heart of the true gentleman of France. He would indeed be unworthy, if no thought of his own missteps came ever to his mind, and as for faith, Monsieur, what better proof could you give me that confidence is not misplaced, when you can feel and confess humility?”

“Mademoiselle,” he replied almost harshly, but his tone only brought a thrill of gladness

to her heart for she knew he was controlling himself with effort, "you will be the first to tell me that no man can serve two masters, and also be true to himself. Sometimes a man cannot serve even one in all honor to his own ideals. Surely then to serve two masters is vilest treachery, not only to himself but to one master, also. My path has become strangely interwoven. I know not whither it tends, nor how to retain my self-respect. If I have done wrong to man it is because at the start I could not deny my own high aims. Yet in striving to follow these last I have come to the destruction of all, both of my masters and of myself. It does not seem just that my very efforts to escape dishonor and to be true to myself, should lead me into even greater difficulties."

If his words were a riddle to her, still she guessed the extent of his sorrow and his great need for comfort, and her reply brought ease to his troubled soul.

"Monsieur," she said kindly, "sometimes one must trust blindly to fate and struggle on with but one real aim—the resolve to be true to oneself. Let that be first in your desires. You have brooded and grieved until all paths are dark and threatening. You have lost your way in realms of warring influences. Be false to none wittingly, but if the choice must

be made, let all else fall except your faith in self. Thus will you also serve, mayhap, one master also, for surely one must be in accord with your self-esteem or you would not have elected to follow him. You have lost confidence in your own decisions, yet I have not, and let me give you further proof of this, that you may have restored faith in your own ability."

As she ceased speaking, she moved lightly to the window and pushed aside the drapery.

"The messenger I expected has arrived, I see."

Faintly came to their ears hoofbeats in the courtyard, and almost immediately Jean ushered in the rider.

The Marquis made as if to depart, but Lady LeRoi interposed:

"Stay, Monsieur, I ask it."

"Mademoiselle LeRoi?" asked the messenger.

"The same, and the Comtesse?"

"Sends her regards," finished the messenger.

"I am the right person?"

"Assuredly, Mademoiselle, and I?"

"You have the packet entrusted to you for me."

With a polite bow he handed her a package and took his leave.

Mademoiselle laughed as she turned to the

Marquis. "Such formality, Monsieur! Yet it is indeed necessary. In that way I am assured that this"—she tapped the parcel—"has not been tampered with, and the messenger knows that I am not a tool of Le Capitaine's, pretending to be Mademoiselle LeRoi, as might have been the case had they discovered my secret. I hold in my hands papers entrusted to me by the Province of LeRoi; pardons to exiles in Spain, signed by the King, his consent to the marriage of my cousin to the Princess Helene—documents Le Capitaine greatly desires, as you know. The night I abandoned my errand in Paris after the attack which you so gallantly repulsed, I left them with friends near Paris, as I feared being watched by Le Capitaine! This I could safely do since I received information of the Prince's disappearance from messengers of my cousin's. In forty-eight hours, however, Frederic D'Antaurier will have them, unless"—she shrugged her pretty shoulders and laughed gaily—"Le Capitaine's men get them first. Doubtless Monsieur de Beauchanson wonders how I should have come into possession of them. The story is too long an one to relate now. The King knows they have miscarried, and is greatly worried lest his enemies get them, but if I can help it that misfortune shall not occur. My cousin's

happiness and the Princess Helene's depend on my shrewdness. Is it not a great responsibility? Mayhap Monsieur will advise me where to place them for safe keeping?"

"No!" almost thundered the Marquis.

"No?" Mademoiselle lifted her eyebrows expressively, and smiled sweetly. "Monsieur is getting better. He is cross. But I never thought the Marquis de Beauchanson would so emphatically refuse a wish of mine. But never mind! I'm glad to meet one man whose wisdom surpasses his vanity. Long ago I knew where I should conceal these. Every château in troublous France has its secret hiding-places, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Her banter was lost upon him, as he stood silent with awe. A great knowledge of what this meant to him held him in its grasp. Nothing was clear to him except the irony of fate in thrusting upon him this information. He took a quick step forward as a tired child pleading for mercy, and held out his hands. Without a moment's hesitation she came to him and placed both her hands in his.

"Mademoiselle!" was all he could say as he held her tightly.

With a happy smile, she looked into his face; for a moment he stood thus, then, putting her gently from him, he crossed the room to the hallway. On the threshold he paused,

and with a gesture of reverence passed out.
She did not hear the words on his lips:

“To be worthy!”

CHAPTER XI

The Crisis

Mademoiselle LeRoi was wandering in the garden, and from his vantage point at the library window, the Marquis de Beauchanson watched her as she went quickly from bush to bush and from flower to flower. The book in his hand was forgotten, if in fact it had ever served any purpose other than a pretense of occupation, the while he furtively and happily observed the charming mistress of the château engaged in her morning duties.

Perhaps Marie LeRoi had guessed that she was the object of someone's attention, for a merrily tender light sparkled in her downcast eyes, and mischief quivered on her lips, as she worked steadily and composedly, cutting and pruning, adjusting and gathering. Slender, lithe, and well groomed, she seemed even more dainty than ever, as she made her graceful way through the gardens. She was as tall as the Princess Helene, and much like her in many ways, save that the calm dignity which became the King's cousin so well was replaced

in this noblewoman by a charming air of reserve. While this proved her womanly character it was only the more enticing and alluring because it gave some subtle and altogether indescribable token of coquetry. The red of her cheeks, heightened by her exercise, and, mayhap, by her thoughts, only matched in brilliancy the velvety richness of the rose which coquetted in her dark hair; and her olive skin, clear and smooth, unlined and glowing, was in glorious contrast to the color rioting in two vivid spots upon it. The Marquis had thought her beautiful on the night upon the causeway, when he had gone to a woman's rescue, and, in looking into her eyes, had found her to be the one of whom he had dreamed and for whose coming he had prayed. But since that evening, he had learned that her beauty lay not in those outward tokens which would ordinarily please the gaze of man, but in the wonder and marvel of her personality and character, pictured so clearly and vividly in the depths of her tranquil eyes. Now glowing, now tender, now exhorting or pleading, now commanding or plaintive, they told the story of her being, and of her inmost thoughts and ideals. Her eyes were herself, and in the moods they portrayed the Marquis had read a history which thrilled and held him spellbound.

Looking into their magnetic depths he had lost all desire for freedom and had plunged eagerly into the conquest of the changing sea, glorying the while in his willing surrender to her siren call.

Softly the Marquis began to sing, and as he hummed the words of a song he loved well, he reflected that once he had come to think that love such as was now in his heart would never fall to his lot, and the thought brought new happiness to his eyes.

“ ‘Eyes of blue and hair of gold? Aye me!
With eyes as dark as a stormy sea
Whose lights are winsome as the sparkling
stars
And with hair as dark as a stormy night.
The maid I love is sweeter far
Than any maiden fair might be!’ ”

He laughed at his poetic fancy.

Hearing his name spoken in low tone, he turned quickly, while he still smiled half merrily.

“Monsieur le Marquis,” Jean came forward slowly into the room, glancing about to see that the Marquis was alone. “I have news for you, Monsieur.”

He carried in his hand a riding-whip, and now he touched his clothes sharply with it so that dust rose upon their surface,

“As Monsieur sees, I have been riding hard, but it has paid. I have just returned from the estate of Monsieur the Marquis de Monterat, and I have some papers which Monsieur will find worthy of his attention, else I much mistake.”

So speaking, he drew forth a scroll of parchment, and handed it to the Marquis.

“I rode over to the château at daybreak, Monsieur, and gained admittance by saying I came from the Marquis de Monterat. As I told Monsieur, I am acquainted with many servants there, and, being friendly with them, they did not doubt my story, knowing as they do, that I am often in Paris on various errands. The man in charge gave over to my keeping this small casket of papers, for I asked concerning certain documents in the mere chance of hitting upon something to our use. Luck was with me. I succeeded far beyond my hopes. It seems that the Marquis had left orders that, if he should send for a packet of papers, these were the ones he desired, and considering me his messenger, they surrendered them to me without a word of questioning.”

The Marquis had been eagerly examining the parchments, and now he cried aloud in surprise and exultation.

“*Ma foi*, Jean! But we have here that which will make the King himself exclaim in

wonderment. Why, fellow, the King is saved, and Paris, too, for with these proofs in our possession, we can rid His Majesty forever from annoyance by *Le Capitaine!*”

In the hour which ensued the Marquis read and pondered upon the papers which had come into his keeping in so strange a manner, and he was only aroused from his reverie by *Mademoiselle LeRoi's* voice.

“Can *Monsieur de Beauchanson* amuse himself this afternoon?” she asked.

The Marquis arose quickly from his chair.

“Pardon,” he said, “I did not hear *Mademoiselle LeRoi* enter. I was absorbed, and she walks lightly, more so than do most women.”

He noted that she was now clad in riding attire, and he marveled at it. She had not left the *château* except by carriage since his arrival in the province, and he wondered what this journey might mean. And meanwhile, even in his surprise, he was drinking in the picture she presented to his eager eyes, in her dark green velvet habit and wide sweeping hat with its gracefully drooping plume of the same rich green. At her bosom was a perfect red rose matching in its rare coloring the crimson of her glowing cheeks.

“*Monsieur* need not excuse himself. So pretty a compliment would condone a greater

fault. Methinks, too, it is the first of its kind that Monsieur has paid me."

She spoke lightly, but some new sadness in her tone touched his heart, so that it was with a corresponding sorrow that he responded:

"It is ever so, Mademoiselle LeRoi. He who thinks most, says least. Some things become too sacred for words. Love is one of these."

Her hand trembled slightly as she played with her riding whip. "Monsieur speaks from experience," she jested.

"From experience, if you wish, but not from 'experiences,' " he answered calmly. "Love has come to me once, not many times, as to some; and when it comes once it is said that it is the best. It found me, Mademoiselle, as I have told you, on the causeway beyond Paris."

"Yes? Fate deals strangely. It is a coincidence—" she hesitated then laughed happily—"but I am forgetting, I must go upon my errand. We all have our missions and our troubles, Monsieur," she added significantly.

"Marie!" He came to her side but she held up a detaining hand. The light which leaped to her eyes at his impulsive address, was clear to him, however.

"Not now, Monsieur, I am late already."

The kindness in her tone robbed her words of all sting.

"Can Monsieur entertain himself for the afternoon? Perhaps he, too, may have work to do in the King's cause. If not, there on the book-case he will find a manuscript which may interest him. It is the history of our troubles in Spain. My uncle is in the midst of the tumult, and he sent me this report for my pleasure."

"Can not I accompany you, Mademoiselle, upon your mission?"

She smiled at the eagerness in his question.


"It were better not, Monsieur. The more quietly I go upon my way, the less fear I shall have of failure. I go to meet my cousin, Lord D'Antaurier, to give into his keeping the documents which he desires so much. We are to meet at the defile on the border of the Province."

"Mademoiselle!" He spoke her name hardly above a whisper, yet all the misery of his heart was in the word.

Deep into her calm, grave eyes he looked, gazed and drank to the full of their purity and wealth of feeling; feasted upon the goodness he read mirrored there; cried out at the fate which had pursued him so cruelly.

The pride with which he had battled during that past week, rose up now to confront him in a final struggle. To save her, then to declare himself to Le Capitaine, and to return

to Paris, yielding to his sovereign's power, was one course. To save her from *Le Capitaine*, and then to give himself up to the punishment for his treachery, was the other way open to him. In these few days both had seemed too repugnant to dwell upon, and he had drifted aimlessly, hardly knowing how he should act when the time came for him to choose among his pride, his love, and his life. But now that the crisis had come upon him, even while he was yet unaware of its rapid approach, all pride, hesitancy and fear were gone. Of a sudden the agony in his heart melted away as if it had never been. A burst of light and song and glory flooded his mind, and face to face with the wonder of her soul his own stood freed and cleansed in the awakening of his greatest manhood. The miracle had been wrought by the magnetism of her purity. The supreme moment had tried him by cruelest torture, and had been met by him with the strength which love only could ever have imparted to his character, and from that instant he was a man untrammelled, unafraid, whom neither threats nor pride could swerve from that even course which would be his. Once having conquered, he could never falter again.

 "You go to meet my lord?" he asked, and something in the way he addressed her made

her watch him wonderingly. "May I ask you this, before you go, Mademoiselle, to take charge for me, of these papers which I freely intrust to you? I must go upon a mission of my own this day, and from it I may not return. I must work out my end in my own way, but of this be assured, Mademoiselle, in serving thee I have found my greatest joy and also my salvation. I pray thee remember this of me always, that when I have erred it has been at expense of misery such as thou canst never suffer, and my one redeeming trait has been my love for thee, which has been as pure and true as ever man's could be for woman such as thou. If I should not return to thee this night, take these papers to the King; but do not so until thou *knowest* I am dead. While I yet live, keep them against my return; but after my death take them to His Majesty, the King."

He gently pushed into her hand the packet Jean had so lately given to him. His suggestion of threatening danger did not terrify her. Though it struck to her heart with a chill of bitter foreboding, she did not shrink before the discovery of his peril. Hers was a nature which not only could face all obstacles undaunted, but could conquer them through sheer force of will.

She looked up into his face, then placed her hands upon his shoulder.

"Monsieur," she said, softly, "thy meaning is not plain to me on many things, but I trust thee. No matter what might befall, my faith would be unshattered, for even as thou hast declared thy love for me, my heart has been in thy keeping since that wondrous night upon the causeway when thou didst fight in my defense and save me from the harm the worst which can befall a woman."

Her voice did not falter, but the wealth of love in her tone seemed a recompense for the trick that fate had played him.

While they stood thus, Jean had entered, and for a moment he hesitated whether to speak or to withdraw; but Mademoiselle Le Roi, with true instinct feeling the presence of another in the room, let her hands fall slowly to her sides and faced the serving-man.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle LeRoi," Jean addressed her, "Madame bade me ask you to see her again before you go."

"I will see her at once, Jean, thank you." So saying she slipped a knapsack from her shoulders and placed it on the table.

"I will take thy papers now, Monsieur, and put them in safe-keeping. I will return presently." With these words to the Marquis, she left the room, and for a few minutes the Marquis stood staring after her. Then with a gesture of reverence, he opened her knapsack,

removed the papers therein, and a moment later he put in their stead the manuscript of which she had told him concerning the history of France's troubles in Spain. It was only the work of an instant to place on the book-case the King's signed pardons to exiles, as well as his consent to Princess Helene's marriage to Lord D'Antaurier. Hardly had he completed the exchange, when a figure darkened the long window opening upon the veranda.

"Du Jeuille!" Tears of excitement sprang to the Marquis's eyes, and he held out his hand to grasp his friend's.

"You are coming with us, Monsieur?"

The Marquis looked at him in agony of uncertainty. "My God!" he cried, "what have I done!"

Du Jeuille leaned forward with a new light shining in his countenance.

"Marquis," he said significantly, "I am your friend. Count upon me for aid. We shall win yet."

The Marquis searched Du Jeuille's face to read his good faith. Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny he grasped his hand in grip of iron.

"You mean it? Ye gods, but it must be so! When the time comes—watch out for my knapsack, my friend!"

“Trust me!”

Uttering these two sharp, clear-cut words, Du Jeuille leaped to the window and sprang into space.

Hardly had the thud of his falling body reached the Marquis's ears, when Mademoiselle LeRoi re-entered the room. Carelessly she swung the knapsack over her shoulder, then held out her hand to the Marquis.

“I must say farewell, my lord,” she said gently.

With no word, the Marquis sank on his knee before her and kissed her outstretched hand.

“My heart is in thy keeping,” he spoke falteringly, “As long as I have thy faith I can live or die content.”

“My faith and love are thine, and ever will be.” Her words came from a full heart.

He escorted her to the door, and then from the veranda watched Baptiste help her to mount. Returning to the library, he took in his hand the papers of which he had robbed her. As he went to his own apartment there was in his eyes an expression of new-found peace.

It was only a few minutes later that, fully dressed for riding and carrying a knapsack similar to Mademoiselle LeRoi's, the Marquis hurried into the courtyard and called to Jean to saddle two horses.

Jean watched his preparations for a journey with interest.

"You want me to accompany you, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Jean. You are armed?"

The man tapped his belt significantly.

"It is well," approved the Marquis and mounted his horse.

At a sharp canter he rode down the hillside closely followed by Jean. For some time they made their way in silence. As he neared the foot of the incline, the Marquis turned to the right upon a narrow path which branched off into the woods. Mile after mile they left behind and two hours sped past as they traveled, and still no words were spoken. Then at length they came to the crest of the narrow gorge which led to the defile upon the Province's border.

Here the Marquis drew rein, for so speedily had they come that they had overtaken Mademoiselle LeRoi despite her start of them. At sight of the erect figure a little distance ahead, standing out sharply against the skyline in beautiful relief, the Marquis came to a halt. An instant he feasted his eyes upon her, and when at length he turned to Jean the serving-man noted the sorrow in his face.

"Something is wrong, Monsieur le Marquis?" he asked anxiously.

Impulsively the Marquis held out his hand to him.

"Jean," he addressed him earnestly, "do you trust me? Do you believe me a man worthy of her confidence?"

"Why, Monsieur," cried the other in amazement, "assuredly." Then he caught a little of the Marquis's meaning, and added significantly, "Even for her, Monsieur, you are worthy enough. I have long seen how things were between you, and in my opinion, my lord, Mademoiselle is to be congratulated, as well as yourself."

The Marquis smiled ruefully.

"Before I leave you, Jean, I must thank you not only for those words, but for all the aid you have rendered me since first we met in Paris. I am only sorry I cannot show my appreciation more substantially—but—as events are now, it would seem that my own reward, however well deserved, is not an enviable one. This may be our last speech together. Therefore, let me shake hands with you, comrade, and bid you 'God speed' for all the future. But I have here a token, a medal, given to me by His Majesty the King, for services, which I want you to keep in remembrance of me. If at any time you go to Paris, find Lord De Chatton or Monsieur Beaumon, and show them this. It will gain

you audience with the King, and receive from him acknowledgement—and favor—such as I am not able to give you though I would.”

“Monsieur le Marquis,” Jean began, much affected, and took the medal in his hand with a gesture of respect.

“Do not thank me, Jean,” the Marquis interrupted. “It is little I can do to repay you. But now I must go on—to the end—the bitter end. Wait here for me, and come to me only when I give the signal, but do not come as if to aid me or as if to fight a foe. Whatever and whoever you find, be silent and discreet; upon it may depend Mademoiselle’s safety.”

“I understand, Monsieur.”

CHAPTER XII

Surrender

The Marquis spurred on his way alone. Ahead of him Mademoiselle LeRoi was approaching the great oak at the defile. Straight onward she rode, and gave no glance behind to see if any one pursued. Steadily the Marquis gained upon her. Then of a sudden she came to a halt in the great open space beneath the giant tree. She looked about her curiously, but with never a trace of uneasiness or apprehension, and thus it was while she waited in patience and security that the blow fell. The Marquis uttered a cry even before he had guessed her peril. Fully a dozen men sprang from ambush on all sides, and in an instant she was surrounded by Le Capitaine's hidden force. With another cry, the Marquis dug the spurs into his steed and rushed upon them.

"Hail, Marquis!"

"Well done, *camarade!*" were the greetings flung out at him by the enthusiastic followers.

But the Marquis saw no one save his master, Le Capitaine. A blur was upon him.

"You—here?" he finally stammered.

Le Capitaine laughed rudely.

"Monsieur le Marquis is surprised to see me? For once, my lord, my fears have been groundless. I did not trust you, you see, so came myself to watch the merry farce. But evidently the Marquis de Monterrat decided to be true to his reputation and to beware the penalty of my wrath."

The Marquis had not glanced at Mademoiselle LeRoi since he had reached her side, but she had not taken her gaze from his face, watching him bewilderedly, and trying to fathom the meaning of these strange words and of the stranger fact of his presence.

"We are all assembled?" The suave voice of Le Capitaine broke in upon her wonderings and brought a chill of terror to her heart.

The Marquis instinctively felt the change in her as she drew herself up rigidly in the saddle, and it recalled him to the peril he was facing, and to the need of instant action. He glanced hastily around the little circle of jeering men. Du Jeuille caught his gaze, and with quick perception of his silent message came quietly to his side. As their horses' heads touched, the Marquis carefully loosened the strap which held his knapsack to his shoulder. The great bag loosened, slipped, but did not fall. Deftly and unconcernedly,

Du Jeuille caught it and slung it over his arm. So speedily and skillfully was it done that not one in all the throng detected their movements.

The Marquis did not dare to look at his friend, but he sighed with relief as he swung about and faced Mademoiselle LeRoi. The look she turned upon him smote him with quick remorse. He had forgotten in his own excitement what must be her surprise and torture at finding him known to Le Capitaine and greeted by these men as a fellow and comrade. Silently they gazed at each other, but the woman spoke no word. Pride was struggling for the mastery. She would not ask an explanation lest she seem to doubt him, and yet her attitude challenged him to tell her without delay the reason for this peculiar meeting.

Le Capitaine, viewing them, laughed aloud.

"Mademoiselle LeRoi is puzzled," he cried sneeringly. "Her faith in her lover is great, since she does not realize that he has betrayed her. But the farce must end. The papers, Mademoiselle! It were as well to give them quietly, for we shall take them by force in the end, if thwarted."

The angry color sprang to the Marquis's cheeks at Le Capitaine's insult, and his fingers twitched nervously upon his sword-hilt. Yet all the time he knew his helplessness.

As he faced the dozen followers Le Capitaine had brought, proving that the leader had doubted him, he admitted that the doubt was not without cause for had there been fewer he would have signalled Jean, relied upon Du Jeuille for aid, and fought even against heavier odds than upon the causeway. But from the first instant of his arrival, he had known that three men, however brave, could not avail against this force.

Mademoiselle LeRoi turned upon Le Capitaine scornfully.

"Monsieur Le *Capitan*," she said bitingly, "is proving his right to this title instead of to that one 'Capitaine' given doubtless in irony by his superiors."

The Marquis laughed at the effect her retort produced.

"Let us apologize, then, for this seeming rudeness," Le Capitaine replied, sarcastically. "'All is fair in love and war,' " he smirked at the Marquis. "It is not our habit to war upon the women of France, but when they have the daring to serve so vile a master as the King, we cannot choose our course."

"And so the habit of insulting noblewomen is becoming a permanent one," interrupted Mademoiselle, haughtily.

With a snarl, Le Capitaine sprang to her horse's head.

"Very witty, my lady," he cried in a rage, "but of no avail. The pardons are ours. You have failed in your mission—and you have to thank for it this man whom you have received at your château, waited upon in his illness, and granted your friendship. It was due to him also that you escaped us once, but he has more than atoned for his fault by bringing about this meeting." He suddenly wheeled toward the Marquis. "Monsieur le Marquis de Monterrat, let me congratulate you upon winning this lady's confidence, and upon your good sense in abiding by my advice."

The reason for his return to good nature was not lost upon the Marquis. He saw at once that Le Capitaine's words had been a token of personal spite caused by his own former treachery. He wished to humiliate him before Mademoiselle LeRoi and play upon their evident friendship.

The woman was pale as she turned to the Marquis, and she raised her head in proud defiance. Half fearing what she would say, he waited breathlessly.

"Are you the Marquis de Monterrat?"

Each syllable seemed like the lash of a whip in his face.

"I have often wished to see him, but I did not expect to find him a gentleman. I had

an altogether different idea of him—and so—because I do not think that all his acquaintances have misjudged him—and also because Le Capitaine calls you by that name, I feel assured, my Lord de Beauchanson, that you are not the noble we all despise.” She smiled radiantly and held out her hand to him.

“Mademoiselle!” The reaction from fear of her distrust and scorn was voiced in the beloved name.

“So you do not believe the word of Le Capitaine,” raged the leader. “Ask Monsieur the Marquis. He will not deny it. He has kept a silent tongue in his head, for he is shrewd. But the time has come for him to speak. I warrant it hurts to confess he has fooled you. Hardened though he is, it would seem his own heart had actually been touched in this case. Come, Marquis de Monterrat, tell the lady your name. Speak up, little man, don’t be afraid!” He jeered insultingly, but the Marquis only laughed.

“When Mademoiselle LeRoi asks me who I am, I will speak.” Emboldened by the confidence he read in her manner, the Marquis tested her.

“And Mademoiselle does not ask you, Monsieur de Beauchanson. You have told her your name and I have no cause to doubt your word, especially when you are accused

by such an one as *Le Capitaine*." She responded to the test most gloriously.

"Perhaps *Mademoiselle LeRoi* will not be so sure of his trust-worthiness when she is told that it is from the Marquis we learned of her intended journey today to meet my Lord *D'Antaurier*. Perhaps, too, he will deny that he was sent by me into the Province of *LeRoi* to secure the documents which *Mademoiselle* has in her possession. And denying this, he will go yet farther and deny that he sent *Monsieur Lerieur* here this message informing us of her coming meeting with her cousin." He drew forth a scroll as he spoke and thrust it into *Mademoiselle's* hand.

Bewilderedly she accepted the missive, glanced from it to the Marquis, then hastily read its contents. Her expression changed rapidly from incredulity to belief, terror, and despair. With a cry of alarm, she let the note drop from her hand, and closed her eyes as she swayed in the saddle. A moment she struggled, then raised her head proudly, as she forced back the rising sob. "*Monsieur—I will—not—believe—it!*" The anguish and courage and pleading in the cry as she still clung to her avowed faith in him brought tears gushing to the Marquis's eyes.

"God bless you, *Mademoiselle!*" he gloried, "*Now, I will speak, and you shall know the*

full depth of my infamy, and the measure of my recompense. Le Capitaine has spoken truly. I sent that message to him yesterday, or rather to his Lieutenant at the inn in charge of his affairs. But when I sent it, Mademoiselle, I thought I lied. I did not dream you would go to meet your cousin today. My plan was to rid myself of these fellows' presence, then to effect some scheme to save you."

"I knew you were true!" exclaimed the woman, her eyes shining in triumph.

"Wait!" he raised his hand imperiously. "It is true also that I came to the Province as a spy of Le Capitaine's. It was the price I paid for rescuing you upon the causeway. I was given this chance to redeem myself. Death was the penalty if I failed, through treachery"—his voice sank to a whisper, and he waited a moment before he continued. "Life was dear to me. I was a coward. I had taken another man's rôle and I could not turn back. Le Capitaine and his men believed I was the Marquis de Monterrat and I permitted the error when I found that a woman was to be molested."

Silence followed his avowal, but it was plain from the countenances of Le Capitaine's men that his words were not believed. To them

it was merely an elaboration of this nobleman who desired to deceive to the end the woman with whom he had played. Only one, and he, Du Jeuille, was affected by his announcement. He scrutinized his friend sharply, the while he recalled the many points of his character and appearance which had puzzled him. Then, turning away abruptly, he rode into the woods and Le Capitaine, without a sign, allowed him to go.

“Who may you be, then, Marquis?” Le Capitaine addressed him amusedly.

The Marquis laughed recklessly, “One who no longer takes orders from you, Monsieur, but one who has gained freedom from your power. At various times since our meeting on the causeway, I have been a coward, but I am so no longer. I came to the Province as your spy—an act of cowardice. Ignorant of Mademoiselle’s identity, still I refused her hospitality, for this much decency I have shown; and when fate drove me so to do, I strove to leave her home and to return to the inn. Threats that I accept of her kindness forestalled me—and again I played the coward and obeyed. I would have gone to Spain into exile. Spies cut me off. Yesterday Mademoiselle LeRoi entrusted to me a secret and she cannot know what she caused me to suffer by her disclosure. In *forty-eight hours* she planned

to give over to her cousin certain important documents. Those were her words, and at length I thought I saw in them an opportunity for gaining respite. Acting on this knowledge, I wrote to the Lieutenant, Mademoiselle, that you would ride forth today, while I believed you would not make your journey till tomorrow. I thought also that my lord would make the journey to the Province over the same road that I had taken, and that you would meet him somewhere to the east of the château. Accordingly I selected the western border of the Province as the place to send Le Capitaine's men, and, by so doing, all unwittingly I foretold your actual meeting place.

"I told you today, Mademoiselle, that I too, had a mission, when I learned that you indeed were riding forth to meet your cousin, and I told you that I must bring that mission to an end in my own way. Along the path I have trod these past few days I have faltered and stumbled and well-nigh fallen, but when today I looked into your face, while you said you were on your way to meet Lord D'Antaurier, all doubt and fears and forebodings left me on the instant. My love for you became better than had been in my heart since our meeting. I have dreamed of such love, but did not think to find it. It awakened then, Mademoiselle. It was no longer faulty,

human, erring, selfish. It burst forth into the full bloom of that grandeur which consists of such purity that all selfish motives are submerged in the overpowering strength of an essence almost divine. Pride, love, and life were the objects of my struggle. It was you who taught me their relative value through the example of your own character. I chose then, looking deep into your heart, and my choice has not changed."

Mademoiselle LeRoi had listened with bowed head as the Marquis spoke and he could not read her countenance, so well schooled was she in hiding her emotion. Now, however, she looked up at him, and in her glance he saw her faith and trust still undisturbed.

"Yes?" she asked gently. "I know, Monsieur, your choice. There can be but one." Her eyes, over-brimming with love, met his.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, but one," he answered softly. "I shall atone for my every faithless thought. Capitaine, do with me as you will. I am your prisoner."

"All very fine and heroic, Monsieur, but we still have the pardons. Has Monsieur the Marquis completed his little affair? It is vastly interesting—the manner in which he can gain all women's love and confidence—but time is speeding, and we must away. Come, friend, end the play, and we'll be gone."

He slapped the Marquis heartily upon the shoulder as he grinned with pleasure. His followers burst into roars of laughter. "You're the very devil of a fellow, by my faith!" he cried between their shouts.

Still laughing, he again approached Mademoiselle LeRoi, and took the knapsack from her nerveless grasp.

"O, Monsieur, I am lost!" In terror she held out her hands to her lover.

"You trust me yet—Mademoiselle?" He bent forward, and took both her hands in his, and his action called forth another peal of laughter from the soldiers. Calmly he ignored them, and as she merely nodded in reply to his question, he reassured her:

"Fear not, Mademoiselle, for all is well. The documents you treasure so carefully are not in the knapsack. There is only a manuscript there, interesting but valueless—the one your uncle sent you from Spain!"

"Monsieur! My lord! My love!" With a cry of joy she flung her arms about his neck, and they laughed and cried together.

Uttering an oath, Le Capitaine tore open the knapsack. One glance was enough to prove to him that the Marquis had spoken truly. White with rage at being outwitted, he rushed at him.

"You dog!" he shouted, beside himself

with anger. "You shall pay for this! Surround him, men! Disarm him!"

From all sides they sprang upon him, tore his sword from his grasp, and dragged him from the saddle.

"Shame upon you! Shame, I say!"

At the clear, contemptuous cry they desisted in their attack and fell back. Mademoiselle LeRoi spurred her horse upon Le Capitaine, and raised her whip above her head.

"Put up your sword, you bully, or I shall strike. What means this? What has this man done but serve his sovereign and the woman he loves? Use your sword if you dare. The King shall know of this, and make you rue this day."

Awed by her courage, and stricken with fear at her words, the men stood waiting bewilderedly. Even Le Capitaine halted and gazed upon her as in a dream. It was only for a moment.

"By my faith, but you're a bold one, Mademoiselle! 'Tis useless, though, to try to fight for him. We do not wish to harm you; but remember, we're twelve to one."

She faced the Marquis fearfully.

"What does it mean? What will they do with thee?"

The Marquis shook off the detaining hands of soldiers, and went to her side as she dismounted.

"It means, Mademoiselle, that I have betrayed Le Capitaine, and must pay the penalty—which is death. There is no redress, I fear. But look up, dear heart—I have kept thy faith. I have cleared my soul of guilt, and have made pure the love I offer thee. And if the love of a man who has hesitated is of any value to thee—"

"Hush, Monsieur, thou shalt not say it. Thou thinkest thou didst hesitate, but it is not true. Unwittingly thou hast ever meant to act the nobler part. This cannot be the end for us. I shall not despair, and thou must be of good cheer. This, then, is what has hushed thy words of love upon thy lips—but now that thou art freed—speak to me, my love—the name thou didst not dare—" she faltered—"thou art more than worthy—"

"Marie!" He gathered her close in his arms.

Silent with shame, the soldiers waited. Before the glory of this woman's faith and love they turned away their faces.

"Come, Monsieur le Marquis," cried Le Capitaine, curtly, "the grave is dug."

"When do you propose to carry out this threat?" Mademoiselle faced him proudly.

"At noon, tomorrow," was the grudging response.

Immediately her strength and fortitude

seemed to desert her, and it was then, as the Marquis strove to comfort her, that he gave the signal to the waiting servant. Quickly Jean responded to the call. As he drew near, the Marquis placed Mademoiselle, drooping with despair, upon her horse, and gave the bridle into the attendant's hand, saying brokenly:

“Take her home, Jean.”

The little cavalcade silent, shamed and sullen, made its way through the woodpath. The Marquis, erect, mocking, cheerful, the only attractive figure in the throng, rode a prisoner in its midst. In his face was reflected a light of happiness such as he had never before known in his narrowly encompassed life. He had at last acted the part of the man, and proven himself worthy the gift of love.

CHAPTER XIII

A Dream of Spain

The slanting rays of the afternoon sun, gleaming at intervals through the dense wood, cast golden splashes upon the narrow forest-path. Now widening, now narrowing, they wavered and fluttered as the breeze swayed branches heavy with foliage, and the sunbeams danced and made merry in the varying shadows of clustering leaves. At another time Du Jeuille would have noted with pleasure the changing scene, gloried in the seclusion of woodsy nooks, and watched the shifting light seek remotest corners; but now he rode furiously through the dell, his horse crashing ruthlessly over the soft carpet of leaves and flowers. His one thought was to reach the open before Lord D'Antaurier could pass on his way to the defile.

By what road Lord D'Antaurier would travel, Du Jeuille had no way of knowing. Yet upon his intercepting the noble before he reached the border and walked blindly into Le Capitaine's trap depended not only the

former's safety, but that of Mademoiselle LeRoi and of De Monerrat, so called. The latter's emphatic denial of right to that name had impressed Du Jeuille so greatly that he did not hesitate to credit the assertion of mistaken identity. Indeed, now that he allowed his mind to dwell upon the matter, he found ample proofs of the error that had been made, and he only marvelled that he had not awakened sooner to realization that it was impossible for this man to be the real Marquis de Monerrat. Follower of Le Capitaine though Du Jeuille was, it has been demonstrated that he was not an ardent believer in his infallibility. So in this instance his sympathies were with the man who had outwitted their leader by rescuing Mademoiselle LeRoi upon the causeway. From the moment the other's sword had flashed from its scabbard in defense of their intended victim, Du Jeuille had felt for this new comrade an admiration and friendliness such as he had experienced for no other comrade in his chosen service. He had foreseen at that time, even while rendering him and the Lady LeRoi aid in their escape, that this would not be the end of the affair if they were to play a deeper game than Le Capitaine, and defeat him on his own grounds. When the Marquis at the château had mentioned the knapsack, Du Jeuille

accordingly had seen the way made clear before him in what manner he could serve his cause, and now, having accomplished part of his mission, that of gaining possession of the coveted documents, his aim was to overtake Lord D'Antaurier before he should stumble defenseless upon Le Capitaine and be taken prisoner. He gave no heed to the Marquis's position, if in fact he dreamed that his comrade was in any peril, for he had no cause to think that the influence which had previously been potent to save the noble would not again stand him in good stead.

When at length Du Jeuille saw before him the end of the woodpath, and beyond, the broad, low stretches of meadow-land, it seemed to him in his great tension that the supreme moment of all his efforts had come. In this instant, he would gain or lose all. With one last mighty gathering of strength he urged his horse forward, and with a desperate plunge it thundered out upon the waving grasses of the field. Then, as Du Jeuille scanned the wide expanse, a cry of relief escaped him and he swayed in the saddle.

Lord D'Antaurier drew rein a few feet away and stared at him curiously and searchingly. So unexpectedly had the rider burst from cover of the forest that the nobleman had been forced to halt his horse with almost cruel

suddenness. Now he spoke no word, yet his eyes were hard with the suspicion forming in his mind. But Du Jeuille did not wait to state his errand. He leaped from his horse, and carrying the coveted knapsack almost ran to D'Antaurier's side.

"My lord!" he cried, his voice thrilling with triumph, "we have won!"

Before the astonished noble could question his meaning, Du Jeuille, strangely moved from his wonted calm, poured out the tale of events from the moment of Mademoiselle LeRoi's rescue on the causeway, to the present attack of Le Capitaine's. With increasing interest Lord D'Antaurier waited for him to finish, and all the while he looked upon the other with an expression of wonder and amazement.

"Monsieur," he cried at last, interrupting Du Jeuille in his eagerness, "methinks I have discovered in you a friend of many years ago. Else my memory much misleads me, you are one who could today be high in His Majesty's court had you so chosen. Instead you followed another path, and yet, while serving Le Capitaine, you have dared to defy him and to serve our cause! Marquis de Belleamie, will you not acknowledge our friendship?"

Silently Du Jeuille held out his hand and met the noble's grasp. His eyes were sparkling with emotion.

"You have not forgotten me, then, my lord?" he questioned, after a moment.

"Far from it, Marquis, and from this day we shall be better friends even than when we served in the same regiment a few years ago. The aid you have rendered me can never be repaid by me, and as for this man you call the Marquis de Monterrat, I cannot express my wonder that one who is a stranger to me has yet proven so true a friend. I can well believe the name is not his own, for he has shown himself to be a man of men, and one far different from what we have known the true Marquis to be. But come, I cannot tarry longer now, for I must away upon my journey, and leave to you for a time the mission of discovering who this man may be, and of bringing me news of him, for I cannot let many days pass before I find him and thank him in person. Will you not come with me now, Monsieur? I would disclose to you a secret."

Du Jeuille nodded, and sprang into his saddle. If he felt curiosity he concealed it, but followed his friend across the meadow to the woods. D'Antaurier plunged into the thicket, the Marquis at his heels, and then he as suddenly halted, for without a moment's warning he found himself confronting what seemed to him could only be a vision. Before

them on horseback sat Princess Helene—and beside her—the Marquis stared unbelievably, his cheeks flushing with wonder, for he was looking into the gentle face of her of whom he had dreamed, the lady far over the border in Spain. As her eyes met his, her lips parted in an explanation of surprise that was almost dread.

A moment he looked upon her, his face expressing the emotions which thronged in his heart, and she, reading aright his countenance, thrilled at the knowledge that all the years had been as naught, but were swept away before the glory and strength of an abiding love. And yet to him she seemed strangely cold and forbidding, for pride and jealousy were surging to make their imprint in haughtiness where he had hoped for kindness to be written.

With an effort, he mastered his surprise, and dismounting, approached the Princess, uncovering his head as he did so, and moving with a grace and deference that caused Helene's pale cheeks to crimson with pleasure.

"Your Highness," Lord D'Antaurier said quickly, "this is my friend and comrade, the Marquis de Belleamie, and he has indeed been a friend to us this day. He has brought to us the King's consent to our marriage, and, but for him and for the aid of another man whose

identity I do not know, Le Capitaine would now have this consent—the Lady LeRoi having again been intercepted—and I would be his prisoner.”

“Sir,” Helene impulsively dismounted holding out her hand to the Marquis de Belleamie as she did so, and he gently kissed it, as he quickly knelt, “your name has long been known to me, and I have wished to meet you. Your qualities have been the praise of all, but I little dreamed I should soon find a proof thereof in kindness so courageously shown myself. Monsieur Beaumon and Lord DeChatton will rejoice that you are found. Far and wide have they searched for you. But here is yet another who will be glad to see your face again. Marquis, I thank you.”

She made a gesture toward her companion and smiled half mischievously, but Lady Marguerite's face remained cold and unresponsive. The Marquis followed her glance, but seeing Marguerite's stern countenance, turned away again.

“Your Highness is pleased to show me more kindness than I deserve,” he replied to the Princess half sadly, “for I have followed one who is the King's enemy, and am no more a noble of his court. To serve you and my Lord D'Antaurier has been my great privilege, and it has been to me far more than you can

know that opportunity has been granted me in this to follow my own motives, and to be the servant of no master, either King or Capitaine."

"It would seem you have betrayed them both."

Cold and hard as the words were, the speaker's voice faltered.

The Marquis flushed, then paled, and as he faced her with a start, the expression of hurt surprise in his eyes filled Lady Marguerite with quick remorse for her cruel words.

"Marguerite!" He spoke her name with all the pent-up sorrow of his many days of wandering and weary struggle.

"You know not what you say, and yet from your viewpoint it seems the truth."

"Lady Marguerite does not understand how much we owe the Marquis de Belleamie."

The low-toned words of Lord D'Antaurier relieved the tension, and without pausing for reply he hurried on to relate the incidents attending Mademoiselle LeRoi's journey to the causeway. And all the while he spoke the Marquis silently drank in his lady's beauty as one who feasted upon long-forbidden pleasures.

When Lord D'Antaurier ended, he turned to Princess Helene saying:

"And now that at last we have the King's

consent to our marriage, Princess, let us go on over the border to some humble priest, before any further ill can befall us."

But Lady Marguerite, having discovered the method of torture to apply to her lover, was not content with the havoc she had already wrought.

"Then twice, my lord," she addressed D'Antaurier, "the Marquis de Belleamie has aided the King's cause despite his position in the service of Le Capitaine."

The nobleman looked at Marguerite in wonder at her scornful tone, then smiled understandingly, a great enlightenment falling upon him. With a gesture of grace, he turned to Helene and took her hand in his, as he said to her tenderly:

"Let us continue on our way, beloved, and leave our friends to settle their little difference. Farewell to you both, and do you, Marquis, see the Lady Marguerite to us in safety at the *Chapelle de Plus Fide*."

The others hardly heard or responded, so absorbed were they in each other. The Marquis had wheeled upon Lady Marguerite determinedly, and now he answered her accusation with a dignity which made her stare wide-eyed into his set face.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, twice I have turned traitor, and aided a cause I could not alto-

gether approve, in direct opposition to what I had supposed to be my convictions. To what I had *supposed*, Mademoiselle—"his voice rang out in triumph—"for after I had entered my chosen service, and by so doing lost the best that life had to offer me"—at his challenge Lady Marguerite hung her head—"I learned to my sorrow my mistake. The cause looked so fair and noble from a distance, my lady, and I was striving to attain something beyond the intrigues of court, but in the midst, the glamour of what I had thought gold turned leaden. Le Capitaine stooped to methods of which even our rash King Louis would have been ashamed. And so once more I had the courage of my opinions, Mademoiselle, though knowledge of the phantom I pursued has come too late, and, as you twice insinuated, I turned a traitor."

Even as suddenly as he had faced her to answer her charge, so now he turned away lest she read the sorrow in his eyes and guess the misery in his heart. A moment only Lady Marguerite hesitated, then, with a quick glance of inquiry, she dismounted and ran to her lover's side.

"Victor," she said gently as she touched his arm timidly, "forgive me—I—" she faltered, as he faced her and looked down into her eyes, his own alight with a new wonder

and hope. The surrender and appeal he read there completed his undoing, and he would have taken her in his arms had she not eluded him. At a safe distance she smiled up at him tremulously, and then she began to speak in tones faltering with her great happiness.

"Has no thought of surprise at my being here occurred to you, Victor? I went with my father to Spain, ordered into exile by the King, but knowing that he would soon sign the consent to our return, I felt no great concern. Then sorrow came to me. My father died, worn out with grief and worry and the effect of the long journey upon his heart which, as you know, was none too strong.

"I could not remain alone in Spain, though many of our friends in like plight as ourselves offered me their hospitality. This I could not bring myself to accept, and as I realized that it was only a question of time before I should be recalled, I concluded to return to France and throw myself upon the protection of Princess Helene. This I did, and my confidence in her character was not misplaced. My life with her has been peaceful, even happy, or would have been if there had not been a bitter memory to keep me ever longing to see one face again."

Once more Marguerite came to her lover's side, and, placing her hand on his arm, looked

up into his eyes, her face alight with the willing surrender of her pride. Her sweet voice trembled as she continued to lay bare her heart.

"But I had another motive in returning to France, Monsieur, and in braving the dangers of discovery and the King's obligations to his denouncers. I hoped to see again the man I had deeply wronged by my false pride and cruel repulsion, and I prayed that I might find him and atone in part for all that I had made him suffer."

"Marguerite!" Eagerly the Marquis took her hand in his, while he drank deep of the love and trust glowing in her eyes raised pleadingly and tearfully to his. The wonder of all that had come to pass held him spell-bound, and with the one cry of her dear name, he struggled to express the glory and beauty of the emotions swaying him. Realizing his inability, he carried her hand to his lips, and would have knelt in his complete abasement and reverence had she not restrained him, her clasp on his hand tightening.

"Nay, Victor," she whispered, yielding unconditionally to the dictates of her boundless love. "Once before thou didst kneel to me, and I in my pride would not listen: now I come as the suppliant knowing better the heart of the Marquis de Belleamie as disclosed to me by my own love and suffering."

“Marguerite, thou hast taught me much,” he acknowledged. “Never did I dream that love like this would come to meet me on the highway of my broken life; that thou of all women wouldst yield thy haughty spirit to love’s dictates in such glorious surrender. Ah, Marguerite, to win thee thus, with all the glad confession on thy lips and trembling in thy glorious eyes, makes perfect all the past with its blind misery and pain.”

For a moment their eyes held in absolute understanding, as she lay in his arms, her head thrown back upon his shoulder, her beautiful coils of hair loosening; then his arms about her waist drew her closer, and slowly he stooped and kissed her lips with all the reverence and calm and trust which was to rule their love and lives.

“Ah, Marguerite,” he said at last, tenderly, “if true love can atone for past follies and be worthy of such regard as thine, my life will be given to thee to do with as thou wilt.”

“Indeed!” At the sneering voice both started in alarm, and Lady Marguerite, her cheeks flushing guiltily, stared in contemptuous amazement at the soldier confronting them with a sarcastic smile. The Marquis merely folded his arms, and looked steadily into Le Capitaine’s face.

“Your life lies in my hands, Monsieur Du

Jeuille, it would seem," Le Capitaine continued threateningly, and at his gesture his followers closed in about the pair.

"Make no blind oaths of lifelong service, friend," continued Le Capitaine, brutally, "for traitors do not live to serve in any cause, and you are now my prisoner, not this fair maiden's, though in a different way, I vow. I tell you now that you shall die at noon tomorrow as befits a traitor, even as your friend De Monterrat will die."

"De Monterrat!" The Marquis exclaimed in his surprise.

The leader crimsoned with sudden passion, and stepping toward the other raised his sword threateningly as he cried furiously: "Does Monsieur Du Jeuille think Le Capitaine has no eyes? Was his aid to his fellows very hearty on the evening Monsieur the Marquis de Monterrat turned traitor? I gave him the benefit of the doubt then and watched. It was not in vain. Today he disappeared for awhile, and when he was next seen he was coming from the direction of the Château LeRoi. When I found the knapsack contained only a worthless manuscript the circumstance was explained. Someone warned the Marquis, and that someone is the same who has ever secretly been his friend and encouraged him in treachery. Du Jeuille bid your sweetheart

a long farewell, and I will see that she continues on her way with an escort to protect her from chance annoyance."

"That is unnecessary, Capitaine," interrupted Lady Marguerite, haughtily, "I accept no protection from the scum of Paris who are not only traitors to the King but murderers as well."

Le Capitaine struck his sword angrily at her insult, and his followers stirred uneasily, flashing bitter glances in her direction. But she gave them no further heed, turning to her lover, her face changing quickly from haughtiness to tenderest regard. She placed her hand in his, and drew him apart from the throng, while the men looked moodily on, but did not prevent their going.

"Where will he take thee?" she questioned breathlessly. "Where may we find thee—thee and this man whom they call DeMonterrat?"

"They will take us to the inn at LeRoi," he answered, simply. "I think they will take us no farther."

"If they do," she responded, "leave us some trail to follow; we will watch for any sign, and pursue, for I am going to the King. Fear not, we will save you both."

"Marguerite, my beloved," he whispered brokenly as he took her for the last time in his arms.

Le Capitaine approached them impatiently, and Lady Marguerite, understanding, motioned Victor to help her mount. As he stood back with uncovered head, his eyes fastened on hers, she met his gaze with one of infinite trust and peace.

"Thank God, I found thee before too late," she murmured.

"Now, Messieurs," she wheeled upon Le Capitaine and his men with all the fury of her hatred and suffering, "let me pass."

Before her glance and tone, they quailed, and, without question or dissent, she rode through the opening they made for her, and more than one hung his head in shame before her silent scorn.

CHAPTER XIV

All Roads Lead—To The King

At the gates of the City of Toulouse Jean drew rein, and glanced inquiringly at his mistress. But Mademoiselle LeRoi was lost in thought as she gazed upon the flags fluttering from the barricades and the officers clad in the uniform of the French Guards lined up beneath the lofty city walls. Toulouse was clothed in all the splendour of gala dress—a second Paris in brilliancy—and the martial music sounding in the distance proclaimed the reason. His Majesty, King Louis XII, was holding state that day, having arrived at dawn after a short tour of the southern provinces.

“Let us go on, Jean.” Mademoiselle LeRoi smiled sadly as she spoke. “It is indeed fortunate for us that the King is here, for had we been obliged to journey to Paris, we might have been too late.”

Through the streets, crowded with noisily cheering throngs, they made their silent way, evading the bustle where they could, ignoring

what rioting they could not escape, until at last they came to the great, broad castle which King Louis made his temporary home. At the entrance to the grounds they were halted by the guards, but Mademoiselle confronted them fearlessly, surrounded though she was by rudely curious soldiers, ready to mock or jeer at any provocation, for on this gala day in Toulouse, the flow of wines and liquors had been in no wise stinted, and few indeed of His Majesty's guard had known when to cry enough.

"I wish to see M. Beaumon." At the sound of the clear, rich contralto voice, laughter and jeers were silenced upon all lips.

An officer bowed low before her.

"If Mademoiselle will enter, I will send a page to find him."

Motioning Jean to attend to the horses, Lady LeRoi followed the guard into the palace. In one of the reception rooms he left her, saying he would send for M. Beaumon. She had not long to wait. Indeed it would seem that M. Beaumon had been beside her before she knew of his presence.

"Lady LeRoi!" he exclaimed in glad surprise as she held out her hand to him. Then as he noted her troubled face and wide eyes, he added anxiously, "Nothing wrong, I hope? Lord D'Antaurier—? The Princess—?"

"I have not seen them," she replied almost abruptly. "I must have speech with the King at once. It is life or death, Monsieur. Can you take me to him?"

He wasted no further words. "Yes," he responded, simply. "Wait here while I secure an audience."

With a sigh of relief she watched him go on his errand.

Twenty minutes later she was ushered into the King's presence. At her entrance, upon the announcement of a page, King Louis arose and came to meet her, giving her cordial greeting; but all the while his eyes searched her face to discover her mission. Raising her head proudly, Lady LeRoi returned his gaze unflinchingly.

"Sire," she said without preliminary, "I come to you for aid, and when I tell you of the matter, I think you will not refuse it. We have served you long and faithfully. Our family has been loyal to all sovereigns, and now my life's happiness is in the balance. Moreover, the nobleman for whom I come to you for help is one of your Majesty's loyal servants, and as such deserves your highest consideration in his peril."

"Tell me the circumstances." King Louis's hard eyes had softened. Her direct manner of speech had appealed to him, as no mere

plea would have done. The method she had taken in asserting her rank and right to his attention had made him resolve on the instant to do all in his power for her; yet he was a man who could be as cruel in denying aid as he could be kindly in bestowing it. Only one woman in a hundred could have succeeded in touching him as had Lady LeRoi in a few brief sentences.

"Will you not be seated, Mademoiselle?" he asked kindly as he offered his arm. She unhesitatingly accepted it while her clear eyes steadily returned his scrutiny.

"I do not come to beg for help, Your Highness," she continued quietly, "I come to seek for justice." Then briefly, but with an eloquence which held her hearer, she told of the events of the past eight days, ending with the account of Le Capitaine's attack that afternoon and his threat of death for his prisoner.

"The Marquis de Beauchanson!" mused King Louis as she ended. "I do not recall the name, but doubtless he is a noble of the Provinces who does not come to court. So you love this man, Mademoiselle?" He laughed as she colored beneath the question. "You need not answer, Lady LeRoi. The fact that you come to me to save him proves it. And we shall try to make that trust not

misplaced. Where have they taken the Marquis, Mademoiselle?"

"To the inn at LeRoi, I believe," she answered.

"You say you first met him eight days since on the causeway, where he rescued you from Le Capitaine?"

As she merely nodded in reply he continued banteringly: "What charm does this man possess to make you love him in that short time, my lady?"

"Is not that love, Sire?" she questioned challengingly. "To me it has always been the best and only way to love—the instant reading of one's destiny. Why dally and wait and deceive one's self? Do we not know at the first meeting that here is one we admire and trust—and desire? Or, at least, should it not be so to be the noblest way of loving?"

The King nodded approvingly. "You plead your cause well," he said softly, and his face lighted with admiration for her frank sincerity, "and I will not deny you are right. And he? He loves you, of course?"

"He gave his life for me, Sire."

"True—but it shall not be taken from him if the way can be found to save him. But these papers of which you speak. Where are they?"

"I know not. Doubtless the Marquis has placed them in safe keeping."

“What were they?”

A moment Lady LeRoi faltered, then unswervingly accepted his question. “Your consent to the marriage of Princess Helene to my cousin, Lord D’Antaurier, and your pardons to exiles in Spain.” Each clear-cut syllable proclaimed her perfect poise and self-control.

“Zounds!” Louis sprang to his feet in terror. “How came you by them?” he demanded furiously.

“The first my cousin gave to me to keep for him. The second were rescued by my man Jean from the hands of one of Le Capitaine’s men who attacked and robbed your messenger on his way to Spain,” she enlightened him calmly.

“Why have you kept them?”

The note of authority did not daunt her.

“To guard them until such time as they could be of best service. That time would have been when my cousin, safely married to Princess Helene, came to you with them.”

The King smiled grimly. “Ah, yes, I see—his pardon as it were. But now—suppose they fall into Le Capitaine’s hands?” He had surrendered his blustering to her greater dignity.

“That is why you must save the Marquis de Beauchanson,” returned Lady LeRoi, evenly.

The King watched her gravely. "I cannot attack Le Capitaine. To do so, even if we overcame him, and carried the Marquis away in safety, means to rouse all Paris to warfare, and to bring the rabble thundering to the palace gate. I see no way to save him."

"You are right, Sire," Lady LeRoi spoke quietly, though her face whitened in despair. "Is there no way, then?"

"We must find one," responded Louis, determinedly.

"And I will help, Your Majesty." Lady LeRoi arose as she spoke. "I thank Your Highness."

The King also arose, and took her hand in his. "Courage, my lady," he said, cheerily. "You have not appealed to me in vain. I feel that the opportunity to serve you will be given to me—and let me assure you, my lady, that you have your own courageous demeanor to thank for all I may do for you. I am the King, and as such have bowed all courtiers to my will, and thus, when occasionally I meet with one whose assurance and pride can match my own, I am glad to call that person 'friend.' Lady LeRoi, I am glad you came to me this day."

He extended his hand, taking hers in his, and the gracious grasp he gave it brought a flush of pleasure to her cheeks in realization of the unwonted tribute he paid her.

In the reception-room Lady LeRoi found M. Beaumon awaiting her, and with him Jean. Instinctively, the noble felt the difference in her mood as she approached him. Her eyes were no longer troubled and heavy-lidded with sorrow, but hope and pleasure shone in their depths, while her whole aspect was indicative of renewed resolution.

“Monsieur.” She seated herself beside him and placed her hand impulsively upon his shoulder, “I feel that I owe you an account of my errand here, and I should like to ask your advice if you can spare me a few moments.”

With his ready response and evident eagerness, she began the account of her strange meeting with the Marquis, and all subsequent events. Her whole personality was shown in the recital, and to M. Beaumon it was plain how much the past eight days had meant in the changing of her life. When she mentioned the Marquis de Monterrat, the noble aroused from the reverie her animated account had inspired, and exclaimed in new interest, and when she had ended with a brief statement of the manner in which the man she loved had surrendered all his hopes in service of her, M. Beaumon arose in his excitement and only waited for her to pause before he made known to her a plan he had evolved while she had confided in him.

But meanwhile, the King had been again approached by a page who asked admission for a nobleman and two noblewomen waiting in the ante-chamber to see His Majesty.

"You know them not?" asked King Louis, impatiently.

"The women are heavily veiled, Sire, and the man wears a riding-habit with a large hood drawn over his face."

"I do not like it," exclaimed His Majesty, peevishly. "I will not see them."

But even as he spoke the door opened quietly, and one of the noblewomen entered.

"Your Highness's pardon," she began slowly. "Will you not receive—?" She had time for no more, for at the sound of her voice, the King, approaching her hurriedly, cried in pleased surprise: "Lady Montarson! I bid you welcome!"

"I thank Your Majesty," and with the words Marguerite threw back her veil, and smiled up at him tremulously. The quivering of her lips and her unwonted pallor did not escape him, and he went to her side with a kindly interest that made her eyes lighten with pleasure.

"You are troubled, Lady Marguerite. May I not help you?"

"I come to you for help, Sire, if you will hear me. But before I crave your aid, I must

explain to you a fact of which you have been kept in ignorance. You have known me as Marguerite Montarson. I have the Princess to thank for this great favor. But in reality I am one who should now be in exile in Spain sent there because the discontents of Paris desired to see the nobles humiliated, and because they had acquired a power over you which you could not cast off. I am Marguerite de Bonnavite."

"Lady Bonnavite!" The King took her hand in his and looked with searching friendliness into her face. "How well I can see now that you must be she," he exclaimed, surprisedly. "Your mother's beauty was famed in Paris, and yet I have not recognized in you her daughter until I have to be told. We are all strangely blind at times, Mademoiselle, and I am amazed that I have not seen her face in yours these many months that you have been at court. I welcome you gladly in your true name, Mademoiselle de Bonnavite. And now tell me how you came to France, and how you prevailed upon the Princess to protect you."

Rapidly she recounted the events of her coming, and when she ended the King regarded her kindly.

"You must remain with us, of course, Mademoiselle, for your pardon was written

long ago, though doubtless you have not received it, since all those documents have gone astray."

"You are wrong, Sire," Lady Marguerite's voice rang out exultingly. "I have mine here, and all the others are at hand." From her bodice she drew a parchment, and handed it to the King.

"How came you by this?" he cried, joyously. His hand trembled from his excitement as he glanced over the document hurriedly.

"I gave it to her, Your Majesty."

The King turned sharply at sound of the heavy masculine voice, and faced Lord D'Antaurier just entering the chamber.

"And here, Sire, are all the documents you signed and sent to Spain. You have nothing to fear on that account from Le Capitaine."

Without a word King Louis took the packet held out to him. Bewilderedly he stared from it to his companions, but so great was his relief and pleasure that he could speak no thanks. A moment he struggled with his emotion, then silently approached the noble and wrung his hand with almost hysterical fervor.

"Your Highness seems pleased." The merry laugh which accompanied the sentence relieved the situation immediately, and when the Princess held out her hand to Louis he

could only smile benignly, as he greeted her with her title.

"Princess, this is indeed a day of the unexpected."

"Princess Helene, yes," she responded, gaily. "But to speak truly, Sire, I much prefer my new title of Lady D'Antaurier."

"Lady D'Antaurier!" gasped Louis helplessly, looking from one to another for encouragement in the surprise which overwhelmed him.

King Louis was not a profane man, but, in the superabundance of his relief in recovering his ill-fated pardons, all ordinary language failed him, and he amazed his hearers by his sudden descent from kingly calm and dignity, in an almost hysterical outburst of words.

"Lady D'Antaurier! Why then—*Lady* D'Antaurier did you say? Why, damme, you're married! D'Antaurier! You villain! Of all the lawless, inane, reckless, ungrateful, meddling—" He broke off smiling in sheepish happiness as he yielded gracefully to the humor of the situation. "O Lord!" He collapsed to speechlessness with this last cry of remonstrance. Then seeing the smiles upon all faces and the joyous light in Helene's face, he capitulated in surrender worthy his station. Realization of what the restoration

of these pardons meant to him dawned upon him in that moment.

"Well, by George!" he exclaimed in enthusiastic delight. "It's damnable! It's glorious! Here, D'Antaurier! Your hand, Princess. Ho, there, guards, a bumper of wine, and be quick, for it's damnable, by George, it's damnable!"

"Here's to the bride! Princess, your health—your happiness! And you, D'Antaurier, you scoundrel! You don't deserve it—my forgiveness—damme if you do, to play me such a trick! But these pardons! And *you* got them! Lady LeRoi succeeded—and this Marquis de Beauchanson—Deserve it? Damme, you *do* deserve it, D'Antaurier, and here's to your damned health!"

An hour later King Louis sat in quiet converse with Lady Marguerite, while near them Princess Helene and Lord D'Antaurier were silently looking out upon the still gardens. Now that the first flush of triumph and joy was over, there fell a calm and hush of realized hopes and satisfying peace. Once more King Louis was the dignified, self-contained sovereign of France; but now there was added to his manner a certain proud kindliness and exaltation which was the result of the varied emotions through which he had passed that day. The fear which had hampered him so long—ever

since the pardons he had sent to Spain had miscarried—was now removed, and in a manner that gave him once more complete power over the rabble of France that had dared defy him. It had been the threat of Le Capitaine to use certain documents he possessed that had driven the King to command Francis of Angoulême to wed the Princess Helene. But these documents were once again in his own hands, and no threat could undo what Lord D'Antaurier had so successfully accomplished. Now that the Princess was the wife of the noble she loved, and now that the King had regained his lost pardons, he could rejoice in all that had come to pass, and admit that this marriage had not been distasteful to him, but pleasing.

There remained only one sorrow in his mind, and to these few companions, whom he felt to be his friends, he voiced it.

"Lady Marguerite," he said in softened tones, "I know not how you have won your way to my heart as you have done, but it is true that from the first your presence at the palace has been a pleasure to me. This Victor de Belleamie who is Le Capitaine's prisoner, though he was once my enemy, has fully atoned for that past, and he will be received by me with all honor and forgiveness. Fear not, my lady, we shall save him and also

the Marquis, his friend. All will be well tomorrow—all—except for Francis, Comte of Angoulême.”

He spoke the name slowly, caressingly, and his eyes were troubled with his sadness. He arose abruptly and paced the room in his unhappy preoccupation.

“Eight days ago he left me in anger—he must now be in Spain—yet Lord DeChatton followed to the border and even beyond without news of him, which is passing strange. I can see him now, so brave, so angry, so mocking and yet so handsome, as he defied me, but I hope his words spoken in wrath may not prove true—‘I shall never willingly look upon your face again.’ ”

“Courage, Sire.” Marguerite went to him and put her hand gently on his arm. Her eyes were shining with tears.

The King smiled at her sorrowfully. “I wish I could see him tonight sitting beside you while you sang as you used to do,” he answered in his self-reproach.

Lord D’Antaurier spoke quietly at his elbow. “Sire, a serving-man is begging admission. Shall I permit him to enter?”

“Nay, I am weary, and I must plan to rescue this fair maid’s lover and also the Lady LeRoi’s.” The King laughed ruefully at his poor attempt at banter.

D'Antaurier turned away only to return in a moment.

"He says, Your Majesty," he addressed Louis deprecatingly, "that it is urgent, and begs that you admit him on the strength of this medal."

He held out to the King a gleaming order, and shrugged his shoulders as if to request pardon for his persistency. But King Louis stared in amaze at the shining bauble, then, raising his hand in gesture of command, his voice rang out imperatively: "Bring the bearer of this to me at once."

Until Jean bowed before him, the King did not lift his eyes from the medal in his hand. Into his face had crept an expression which transfigured it with new kingliness and nobility.

When the serving-man knelt, he could only ask arbitrarily:

"Where came you by this medal, man?"

"Sire," Jean replied, "it was given me with the suggestion that in time of need I should present it to you and gain recognition from your hands."

"And you desire—?" King Louis's dry lips could hardly frame the question.

"To report to Your Majesty that I have two prisoners in the gaol—one of them the murderer of the Marquis de Monterrat, the other a lieutenant in Le Capitaine's service,

and his most trusted spy. I have captured them with the consent and approval of M. Beaumon for the purpose of exchanging them for the two prisoners Le Capitaine holds, whose release we desire to secure."

"Good. The plan is excellent. Mademoiselle de Bonnavite, the way has been made for us, you see, and Victor de Belleamie as well as the Marquis will be exchanged tomorrow. But you, Monsieur, tell me this—" the King's voice rang out in his old-time despotism, "how came you by this medal? Who gave it to you?"

"It was given me by the Marquis de Beauchanson," Jean answered unabashed.

"The Marquis de Beauchanson! The Marquis—de—Beauchanson!" repeated Louis in puzzled tone. "The Lady LeRoi's guest, and Le Capitaine's prisoner. And he—surely it cannot be. It cannot be. And yet—it must be. There is no other like it in all France. Ah, friends, I dare not hope it. I dare not think of it. But if it is he, thank God!" And the King, swayed by his emotions for the second time that day as never in all his tyrannical life before, bowed his head on his hands and wept.

CHAPTER XV

At The King's Pleasure

Long and bitterly during the night watches in his gloomy prison had the Marquis de Beauchanson reviewed the events of his life now drawing to its close. First the years of narrow compass, few aims and fewer achievements; then the day of awakening to realization of the existence of worthier ambitions and ideals; next the hour of his testing, in which he had accepted love in all the glory of its sacrifices and sorrows; and finally the moment of untrammelled surrender to the nobler course it demanded that he pursue. Thoughts of Spain were not absent from his summary of his recent opportunities, and yet he felt no regret in recognizing the fact that even at this moment he could have been far over the border in safety and peace—and exile—had he not meddled with the affairs of one whose name only had been known to him. The past eight days had taught him much concerning his own character and outlook upon life of which previously he had

been ignorant; the knowledge that he had played a better part than ever before in his career, as well as the unwavering belief in the wonderful love which transfigured the world in his eyes, were ample recompense as the shadows of death seemed to draw closer and heavier about him.

It was upon this exalted mood that Le Capitaine had entered and proclaimed to him that he was once more saved from the hangman's noose, in that His Majesty, the King, had commanded his presence by right of exchange. The Marquis had raised his head listlessly at the announcement. It was evident that the unexpected respite held for him neither pleasure nor relief, and in baffled amaze the leader had exclaimed:

“*Ma foi*, Monsieur, what indifference is this to death by hanging! Methinks it would appear that you had enjoyed the prospect. Or mayhap, 'tis because the King is no great friend of yours that you are not anxious to present yourself before him. I do not wonder for he is no great comrade of my own, though I warrant it was from a different cause than influenced you that I entered into opposition of his will. But, come, mayhap another piece of news I have will please you better, and reconcile you to this order of His Majesty's. It is to Lady LeRoi, Marquis, that you owe this lease of life.”

The half-hearted surprise which had shown in the noble's face at this disclosure only served to complete Le Capitaine's bewilderment. He had arisen, saying dully:

"I am ready, Capitaine, to follow you."

After four hours of hard riding the little escort of Le Capitaine's men halted with their prisoner before the gates of Toulouse. An exchange of compliments with the guards, a slip of paper presented to the watch, and they entered the city wall. In silence they had ridden from LeRoi, and Le Capitaine was indeed puzzled by the downcast mien of his captive.

"Monsieur is surprised to see Toulouse so festive?" the leader questioned, breaking the silence at last to enjoy, if he could, the other's discomfiture. "Did we not seem illy equipped for a journey to Paris? The King is holding state today, for Toulouse received him yesterday. The people are fickle, Monsieur, in these provinces. In Paris it is different. It was a clever stroke of His Majesty's—his tour of the country in hope of restoring peace and of regaining his subjects' good-will. On seeing him, they forget his title of 'King.' To them he is once more the Duc of Orleans, their former friend and protector. That is to say, in the southern provinces. They are his, but in the north—and it is Paris and the north

that count, it is not so—they are Le Capitaine's."

The Marquis vouchsafed no reply, and after a moment, Le Capitaine made one further effort to prod him to retort.

"Well, Marquis de Monterrat, the King seems a good friend of yours to invite you to his palace. You are to be congratulated or condoned with, I know not which."

"I am not de Monterrat, as I've said before, Capitaine. However, it seems to be your destiny to mix names and antecedents," was the cool rejoinder.

"What do you mean?" Le Capitaine, taken aback by the unexpected reply, wheeled upon him with startling eagerness.

The Marquis laughed mockingly, and even as he dismounted before the castle-gate to accompany the guard who approached him, he flung back a parting shot.

"Only, Monsieur, that I know more concerning your identity than do you yourself, and, as you rightly said, my reason for opposing the King was not identical with your own."

Ten minutes later the Marquis waited in the ante-room to the King's chamber for the summons to enter. It was a moment of strangely new suspense for him, but when he saw a page approaching, a gleam of amusement twinkled in his eye as the boy bowed low, but indifferently, before him.

"If Monsieur will step this way," he drawled, lazily, then stopped abruptly as his gaze was arrested by the noble's mischievous glance.

"Monsieur—my lord!" The blue and silver figure bobbed excitedly as the youth, quite overcome by the seeming apparition, stammered and faltered before him, all his indifference and ennui vanishing with almost ludicrous suddenness.

But the Marquis arose and merely bowed mockingly. In swinging, easy strides, he crossed to the council-chamber, leaving the page standing in open-mouthed deference until the rose-satin drapery fell and concealed him from view.

In the council-chamber King Louis waited impatiently, seated in state upon his resplendent throne. At first glance the room seemed empty save for his somber presence, but the keen observer would have noted at once the drooping figure of a woman seated in the shadow of the balcony window. Quiet and passive as she seemed, her hands were tightly clenched in nervous expectancy and her lips were white beneath the pain of constant compression. With the motion of the rose drapery she had started, and now raised her head half fearfully.

A moment the Marquis stood motionless in

the doorway, regarding the King, then his gaze passed on to the other silent, waiting figure. Instantly his calm forsook him. He sprang eagerly across the intervening space, and kneeling before her, held her hands tightly in his own. The manner of his going to her was the greatest compliment he could have paid her. It was the natural impulse of unquestioning devotion, and she, realizing the significance of his absolute forgetfulness of his sovereign, flushed with the pleasure of his reverence, while the King looked on smiling at his own predicament.

"Marie!" He whispered her name exultingly, yet with the deference he owed her for his life.

Freeing her hands gently, she placed them on his face upheld to hers, in a sudden gesture of impulsive gladness.

"Methinks, Monsieur," King Louis's voice, hard and crisp with irony, pierced their dream of happiness, "the obeisance should be to your sovereign."

The Marquis arose hastily, stepped toward the dais, drawing himself proudly erect, folded his arms with infinite coolness, and looked squarely into the King's eyes.

"So it is you!" Sharply cut as was each word, and intense as was their regard each for the other, there was neither surprise nor coldness in the King's intonation.

"Yes, Sire," was the calm response.

"And so you come at last to look upon my face—'willingly,' shall we say?"

"Nay, Your Majesty, only because the woman I love mapped out this course for me. My duty and my privilege is to serve her slightest wish. She strove to save me in my peril, and I accept from her hands what I would reject from another's. It is merely my tribute to her, Sire, not to you."

"Love gives you new humility, sirrah," the King made cynical answer. "And have you also come at last to do my will? You appear before me a hostage, and, as such, signify your willingness to do my behest unquestioningly. You have not forgotten this, when you claim my protection, I trust?"

"I understand Your Majesty's meaning, but I must decline to accept my safety upon such terms. When I refused before, Sire, to wed the woman of your choice, I did so from a standpoint of principle merely, a simple question of honor and self-esteem; but now there is a greater reason why I should scorn to buy my life by weak obedience to despotic command, and to win high privileges from one who shows spasmodic and self-interested favors. I am pleased to think that the love I have given to the lady of my heart is of too high a quality to be desecrated by this con-

sideration of a marriage for kingly convenience. It would seem, Sire, that I have merely substituted captors. I am your prisoner, Your Highness, and I pray you end this mockery quickly, else I take matters once more under my own control. I would have preferred death at the hands of Le Capitaine, but my love for Lady LeRoi has given me strength to accept it from your hands."

"You have stated correctly the penalty for your disobedience, Monsieur, for as you know, I have shown scant mercy even to those of royal blood who have defied me. Take, then, your choice, sirrah; marry the Princess Helene, or die a traitor's death."

"Your Highness knows what my choice will be."

"Do you still refuse, then, to wed the Princess?"

"You had my answer ten days ago, Sire. It is the same now."

"Your Majesty." Lady LeRoi, wide-eyed and pale with the destruction of her dreams, approached the throne. "Surely Your Majesty does not mean that this man must marry the Princess or go to his death. Why, Sire, she loves Lord D'Antaurier, my cousin, and the Marquis's love, also, has been given elsewhere."

"That is for him to decide, my lady, I can

say no more." The King's words were hard with a sovereign's tyranny and power.

The Marquis went to Lady LeRoi's side and took her hand reverently in his, while he looked down upon her with all the wealth of his love shining in his eyes.

"Sweetheart," he said, tenderly, "thou dost not understand. I came to the King for thy dear sake, but I knew to what I came, and I am prepared to accept his sentence. Do not grieve, fair lady, what is to be, must be."

"But if thou wilt wed Helene," she cried feverishly, "thy life will be spared. So consent, dear heart, and relieve me of this terror. Only to have thee live will be joy enough for me, if I can feel that I have saved thee."

She put her arms pleadingly around his neck and raised her eyes, full of bitter tears of willing renunciation, to read his answer. Compellingly he drew her to him and placed his hand on her head. Even before he spoke she knew that he would never release her from her pledge to him, and with a woman's contrariness her face lighted with her joy in his changelessness and new-found nobility.

"Nay, Marie, thou knowest not what thou askest. I can wed no one but thee, even as I know thou couldst consider no other in the light of a possible husband under similar circumstances. Wouldst thou have me less

strong than thou, my beloved, wouldst be? Surely thou wouldst have me true to the love we have pledged to each other, even though I perish in proving how dear thou hast grown to me?"

"Thou art right," she whispered, "and I love thee for it. There could be no one but thee in all the world forever."

"This, then, is your decision, Cousin Francis?" King Louis's eyes belied the sternness of his voice. He came toward them with sudden impulsiveness, but Lady LeRoi, blind to all in the sudden knowledge which had come to her, cried out in consternation and drew back from her lover's embrace. Her face was blanched with the effect of the King's revelation, and now, trembling in her excitement, she looked upon the erstwhile Marquis.

"You, Monsieur, are the King's cousin—the Comte of Angoulême?"

Her cold return to the formal method of address did not escape her hearers, and the Prince, in his eagerness to justify himself, sprang to her side.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed passionately, relapsing to the once dear title by which he had first known her.

But she held out a detaining hand as if forbidding him to speak further.

"Mademoiselle," he hurried on, refusing to



“ ‘Thou art right,’ she whispered, ‘and I love thee for it’ ”

heed her gesture. "Hear me, I pray you. Is it my disloyalty which offends you?"

"How can you doubt me?" she interrupted almost fiercely. "Have I not shown absolutely my love for you? Have I not appealed to the King for aid in my despair? Have I not pleaded with you to wed your cousin that your life might be spared? Have I not proven my faith and trust in you with every word and gesture? Have I not gone to you willingly, given you my lips and my caresses which I have kept unsullied for the man that I should love and wed? And now you accuse me of being displeased at your refusal to obey your sovereign. Nay, Monsieur, it is you who have deceived me, and played with my love as if it were a worthless toy to be used for your passing amusement."

"Marie." The word soothed her in her delirium of sorrow and reproach. "True, I have deceived you, but only in my name, and for the time that I was helpless to enlighten you. But you do me wrong to tell me that I have played with your love. I am free to give my love wheresoever I choose. I am not the King's puppet, as I am proving, and I shall wed the woman I love if I live to do so."

"I could not consent," she interposed hurriedly. "The King could not consent. You are of the family royal, and should you

wed beneath your station, you would forfeit all right to royal honors and your possible claim to the throne of France. I am not your equal by birth, and as such am barred from your life. You knew this—and yet—and yet—you won my love and faith, and robbed me of my happiness!”

“Hush!” The Prince in a frenzy of emotion commanded her to silence. “You shall not say this of me. My love and life are given to your happiness. What is the King? What are honors? What is station, family, power, and favors, even the throne itself compared to you? I do not want them. I want you only and you shall hear me in this.”

As one fascinated, she stared upon him in his new manner of authority. Then he went to her and took her hand in his, as though she were a child to obey him, and with a sigh of peace and contentment, she clasped her fingers about his. Having found her master she did not seem dismayed, but happy in her surrender, as has been the case since the beginning of all time, and as will be so as long as there is a woman true enough to glory in obeying the one man above all others whom she trusts.

“There is one condition, my lady, which makes such a marriage possible, with no renunciation upon the part of anyone of royal blood.”

As if awakening to the presence of the King, his cousin and Lady LeRoi faced him in confusion. But in the King's face was only a beautiful tenderness, such as none had ever before seen therein, and reading it aright the Comte of Angoulême went quickly to him and knelt before him.

"Sire," he said, abashed in the sudden understanding which had come to him of the King's new kindness, "I crave your pardon for all my disobedience and injustice. I can see only friendliness and love in your countenance and speech, and I have been wrong ever to doubt that you had anything but good-will and kindness toward me."

The King stooped, and placing his hands on his cousin's arms raised him. "So you see at last that I am not your enemy," he laid his hands caressingly on his shoulders. "Ah, Francis, it has been a cruel hurt to me that you have thought me hard and unfeeling, but now methinks I can prove to you how great is my regard for you, and how gladly I will pardon you and serve you."

He held out his hand to Lady LeRoi, and taking hers placed it in his cousin's, as he continued: "Lady LeRoi cannot gainsay her promise to you, Cousin, and I am glad that I can by my consent make possible this marriage, for all that is needed in such matters is the

sovereign's approval and his bestowal of a proper title upon the lady concerned. You, Cousin Francis, could not wed the Princess Helene if you so desired, for she is already the wife of Lord D'Antaurier, and I believe his objections to such an alliance would be strenuous. As for you, Lady LeRoi, such love as you have given to the Prince is worthy of every honor in its consummation, and so I ask you in all reverence to accept from my hands the future title of"—he paused a moment and chuckled gleefully—"Comtesse of Angoulême!"

His meaning was not lost upon them, and the Prince in a storm of joy clasped the Lady of His Heart passionately in his arms, while she whispered as she yielded to his embrace: "Comtesse of Angoulême! Why, that will be—thy wife!"

A little later, when the Prince had partially regained his composure, he addressed the King in a new excitement:

"And now, Sire, I believe that I can pave the way for a service which will be as great a surprise to you as your kindness has been to me. You played your part well, Sire, in leading me to believe I must still wed the Princess Helene, when you knew her to be all the while the wife of Lord D'Antaurier and had granted to them pardon and restored favor."

The King smiled delightedly. "That, Francis, is one of the pleasures of life—to play with my subjects. But of what do you speak when you say you can serve me again? You have already served me well, Cousin, in restoring to me my pardons."

"I can, I believe, make Le Capitaine your friend, and not your enemy."

"If you can do this, Francis, you can do what no man in France can do, and you will win my eternal gratitude—and any favor you desire," he added, laughing merrily.

"Mademoiselle LeRoi has in her keeping documents which I shall need for this. Couldst thou send for them, Marie?"

"I have them here at the palace, Francis, and I will go for them immediately."

"Nay, there is no hurry. Stay thou here for the present. But, Sire, if you will send for Le Capitaine, I will show you how my boast can be accomplished."

"As you say, Francis, I will send a messenger at once. And, meanwhile, let me suggest that you go to your old apartments and don a costume that befits your rank. And, by-the-way—this medal—" He held out the medal Jean had surrendered to him, and the Prince took it amazedly, while he listened to the King's explanation of the Marquis de Monterat's death and the capture of his murderer.

Thus for the first time did he learn why he had not been discovered in his rôle as the Marquis.

"But wait," King Louis exclaimed a little later as the Prince and Lady LeRoi were about to leave his presence. "It were well to have you meet the Princess now, and her husband, Lord D'Antaurier, and also you should congratulate the Lady Marguerite de Bonnavite who is to wed the Marquis de Belleamie, your former friend whom you have known as Du Jeuille."

"Du Jeuille here! And he is Victor de Belleamie!" cried the Prince.

The King made his way quickly to the doorway of an adjoining chamber, and raising the drapery spoke in a low tone to someone within. His remark was greeted by laughter of many voices, and when he turned back to the Prince he held Helene's hand in his, while her other rested on her husband's arm.

"Lord and Lady D'Antaurier," he announced grandly, "or rather the Duc and Duchess de Genest, for the royal bridegroom must have a royal title."

The Prince and Lady LeRoi went quickly to meet them to express their delight and best wishes. "These, my children," King Louis added teasingly, silencing Lord D'Antaurier's expressions of gratitude, and indicating his cousin and Lady LeRoi, "are soon to be Comte and Comtesse of Angoulême."

In the midst of their merriment and congratulations, the King took the Lady Marguerite's hand in his as she came silently from the other room to his side, while the others were conversing. Victor de Belleamie followed her, and now the King placed the girl's hand in her lover's as he drew them together with an air of fatherly tenderness which touched them both.

"Congratulations are indeed in order, *n'est-ce pas?*" he said, lightly, to all his happy culprits. "But remember that it is to me, the hard, unsympathetic, despotic King Louis, to whom you owe all this. Which reminds me, Marquis de Belleamie, that I have not told you that Lady Marguerite shall not come to you dowerless. As maid-of-honor to the Princess she is of high station in my court, and as such must have an estate to hold a country-seat for her entertaining. Your castle, Monsieur, will suffice, for yours is an old and honored title in our realm; but Lady Marguerite brings to you as dower the wherewithal to support it in true grandeur, and King Louis requests the right to give the bride this wedding-gift. Nay, do not thank me," he added, as Victor tried to speak, "this is my manner of meting out justice and mercy to those who come within my power. At the King's pleasure, Monsieur, you forget that you are all *at the King's pleasure.*"

CHAPTER XVI

Night and Song and Love

Le Capitaine entered the King's council-chamber with an air of defiance that showed how truly he knew his power over the rabble of Paris, and his power to annoy and harrass the ruler of France. He did not wait for King Louis to address him first as court etiquette demanded, but spoke abruptly as he stood erect before the throne.

"I am here, King Louis."

The King smiled amusedly, for an air of bravado seldom angered him, but rather interested him.

"So I see, Monsieur, and, as you seem to wish it, we will come at once to the matter concerning which I sent for you. My cousin, Prince Francis, Comte of Angoulême, will express my pleasure to you."

Following the King's gesture, the leader wheeled to face the Prince who had just entered. For a moment he saw only the brilliant military costume, upon it the gleaming orders of army and royal rank, then his gaze

wandered to the nobleman's face, and immediately he recoiled.

"You!" he gasped in consternation.

Prince Francis smiled merrily. "Even I, Capitaine," he replied with a mocking bow. "Are you not sorry, Monsieur," he questioned after a moment, in which he noted the grudging admiration of his former captor, "that you did not hang me the first time it occurred to you to do so?"

Le Capitaine was forced to laugh ruefully at the position in which he found himself, but he could say no word, so overwhelmed was he in thought of his important capture.

"I am going to show you, Capitaine, however," continued the Prince almost kindly, "why you would have been immensely sorry if you had done me harm in these past few days, and I do not say this as a threat but as a token of my interest in you. You doubt this," the Prince added evenly, as Le Capitaine smiled in sarcastic skepticism. "However, this is the point. You are now an enemy of the King, my cousin, and I am going to tell you why you are so, and to prove to you that your reason is no reason, and consequently that you should be his loyal subject and friend."

"If you can tell me that, Prince Francis, you will surprise me. No man but myself

knows of that matter. It is not the usual reason why men refuse allegiance to their king. It is neither frenzied patriotism, nor the calling of a spirit of reform, nor is it because the King has done me wrong, but still it is a personal grudge I bear him which has led me to take up arms against him."

"Will you admit that I am right, if I tell you the true reason?" The Prince ignored the other's remonstrance.

Le Capitaine's eyes gleamed, and for a few moments he held the Prince's gaze steadily.

"Yes," he said finally, "I think that is a fair proposition." His tone showed that he considered the condition impossible and that he was safe in such a promise.

"Your mother, Monsieur, was the Lady Anne de Moirée."

At these words the blood rushed to Le Capitaine's face, and he stepped forward fiercely, as his eyes showed how greatly moved was he.

"What mean you?" he demanded, as his breath came quickly.

"You are the enemy of King Louis XII because you believe that your father was King Louis XI."

"Zounds!" The King sprang from his chair in his amazement.

"*Sacré!*" Le Capitaine was now as white as

he had been crimson. "How guessed you this?"

"Monsieur, you are wrong. Your father was the Marquis de Monerrat, and I have here letters from your mother to him which prove it. Also let me add that your mother, Lady Anne de Moirée, was legally the Marquise de Monerrat."

"Legally. Legally." The words were fraught with the misery of years, as Le Capitaine held out his hand for the bundle of papers the other held. "*Ma foi!* The Marquis de Monerrat—my father—he married her!"

Feverishly he turned the papers in his grasp, reading here and there, as chance dictated. His eyes were sparkling with excitement, and seeing the expression in his face the Prince was moved to pity, for he read as in a flash of inspiration the suffering and despair which had driven this man to avenge his fancied wrongs.

"Monsieur!" Le Capitaine no longer bold and brazen, but deeply affected, turned to the Prince. "You know not what you have done for me. I have cursed my mother. I have cursed my supposed father. I have cursed all mankind, including myself—and now you give me back my faith and hope. You give to me a name and self-respect. You—"

He could say no more, and the Prince made

no reply but held out his hand and grasped the other's sympathetically.

"Sire," Le Capitaine turned to the King with sudden humility. "I crave your pardon. I have wronged you as well as King Louis XI, and I am sorry."

"Say no more of this, Monsieur, I understand." The King placed his hand kindly on the other's shoulder.

"This is as much a surprise to me as to you, and I shall at once atone for the unhappy past by restoring to you your father's title of Marquis de Monterrat, and also his estates which had been confiscated by the crown. Of course this means as well the income attendant to care for them. This is a pleasure I had never dreamed would fall to my lot, and in return I only ask that you will be my friend."

"Sire," the new-made Marquis knelt before his sovereign in all the deference of one who has met with friendliness which melts the heart, "everything that I can do to make your enemies your friends I shall do, and from this hour I am your loyal subject."

That night the castle in Toulouse was brilliant with many lights, and festive with flowers and gala dress, for thus did the King celebrate the happy return of his cousin, as well as the betrothals of two of his favorites and the marriage of the third. The scene

reminded one of the assembly nights of Paris, and particularly of that one ten days since when the Comte of Angoulême had defied his cousin, and disappeared into willing exile. All the proud nobility of France was present on this evening of rejoicing, and the castle rang with joyous laughter and merry voices as they united in homage and congratulations for the Princess Helene and the returned Prince.

Perhaps of them all, however, none was happier than M. Beaumon and Lord DeChatton who vied with each other in loving attention to the youth they had sought so long and vainly, and to the maiden who walked proudly and happily beside him.

In the high trellised garden, in the cool and friendly darkness, the Prince and Lady LeRoi made their slow way. Now that the end of their perils and sorrows had come they spoke no words, but drank to the full of the peace and joy which had crowned their days of struggle and difficulties. Her hand rested lightly on his arm and his hand in turn lay upon hers, and thus they paced the fragrant, rustling garden-path, in its soft light of silver moon and stars.

“ ‘And on the ninth day,’ ” Francis broke the silence at last, “ ‘there befell a great good fortune.’ Is not that what is said of the magic number nine? And it is true—for me.

Today is the ninth since I saw thee on the causeway."

"And fought for me," she responded softly.

For a time longer they walked in silence and then again the Comte of Angoulême spoke.

"Hark!"

From the palace came the low, sweet notes of a song to the tinkling accompaniment of a harp, and they stopped to listen to the tenderly joyous refrain.

"In the shadows and the gloaming
Music falling clear and light,
Then I dream my soul's deep dreaming,
Follow fancy's playful sprite.
Longings fill me 'neath the magic,
Longings which I recognize,
And though wakening spells the tragic,
I bid love to tyrannize."

"It is Lady Marguerite's voice," he informed her.

Without a word Lady LeRoi looked up into the Prince's eyes.

"Mademoiselle!" he whispered.

Around them was the perfume of flowers, the magic of song and the romance of night, and in their hearts was the abiding peace and gladness of unquestioning love.



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